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*THE STORY OF A NEW YORK CITY TENDERFOOT AND HIS*

# ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE

BY ARTHUR L. BENSEN

FRONTIER TOWN

**"FRONTIER TOWN IS ONE OF THE UNIQUE TOURIST ATTRACTIONS IN THE UNITED STATES.** It is the result of an idea of a Staten Island telephone man who adopted the Adirondacks as his home and then decided to preserve the history of the area in an entertaining fashion and share it with thousands of tourists each year. For more than a quarter of a century, Art Bensen and his associates Ed Ovensen and Magnus Andersen have brought fun and a sense of history to the American Tourist."

*Joseph J. Horan*

Mr. Horan is the leading travel authority in the U.S. His excellent work for 29 years as Director of the Travel Bureau of N.Y. State led to his selection as President than Chairman of the National Association of Travel Organizations. At President Eisenhower's request, he served on an advisory committee which lead to the creation of the U.S. Travel Service. Now retired in Troy, N.Y., Mr. Horan is busier than ever trying to meet the demand for his services as consultant and public speaker on the subject of travel.

***THIS BOOK CONTAINS OVER FIFTY PHOTOGRAPHS***

*FRONT COVER PHOTO*

*Here I am posing at our Frontier Town Airpark with our faithful Cessna One Eighty, Swift Eagle, his son Powhatan, his daughter Motoaka and our 100 year old Concord stagecoach.*

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# ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN ADVENTURE

BY ARTHUR L. BENSEN

*With sincere appreciation I dedicate this book to our very competent and loyal employees without whom Frontier Town would not have been possible.*

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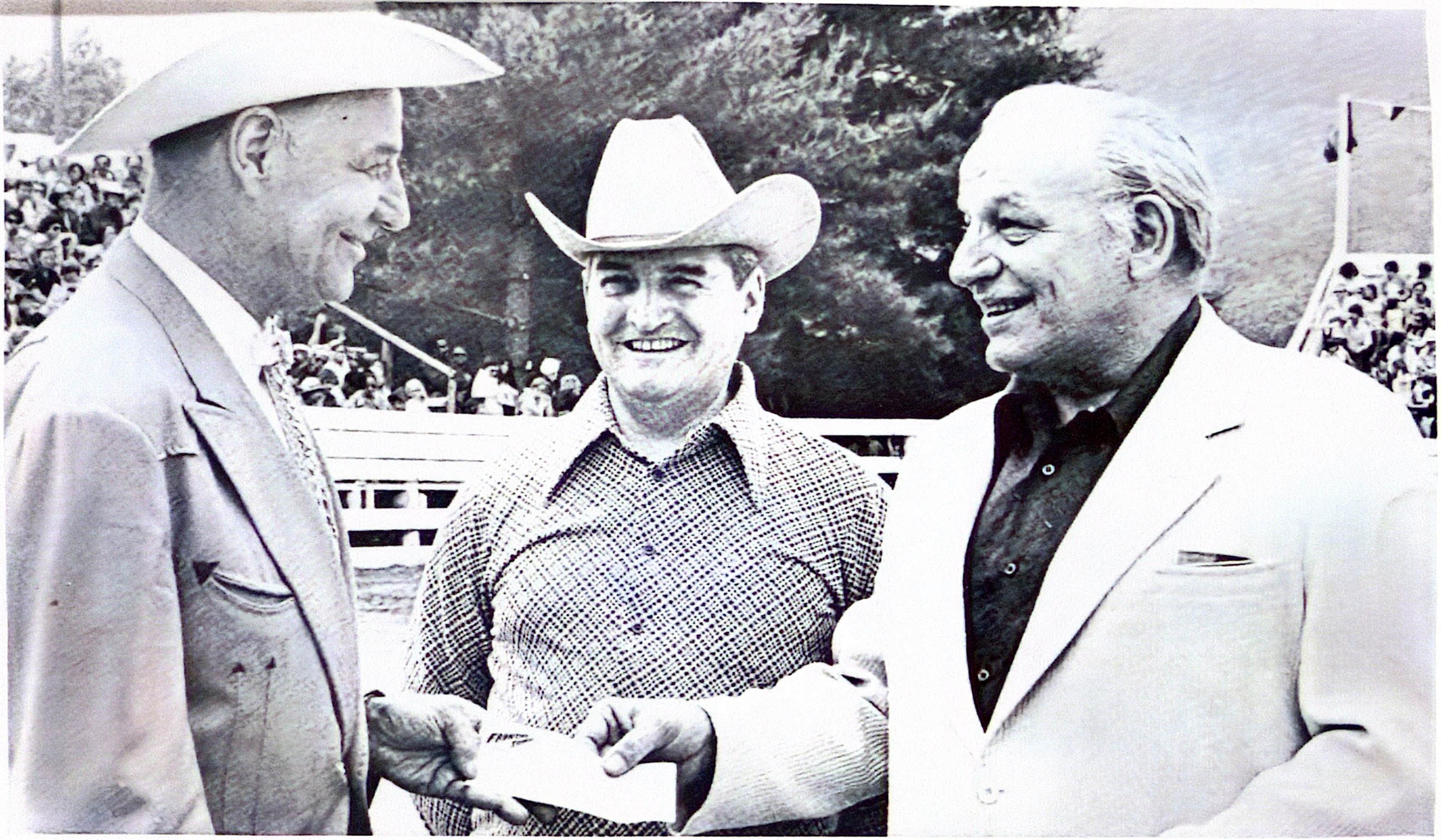


In appreciation of the millions of Canadians who have visited Frontier Town over the past quarter century, at a brief ceremony in the Frontier Town rodeo arena, I presented a check of $15,000 to the Canadian Olympic Committee to make it possible for underpriviledged Canadian children to attend the 1976 summer Olympics in Montreal.

# INTRODUCTION

**By REV. JAMES E. MATHERLY**
Schroon Lake, N.Y.

This is not a story of rapid riches. Success at Frontier Town came the long hard way.

Arthur Bensen writes mostly about people, all of whom I have known personally. It is a warm simple story about the ruggedly independent, self reliant mountain people among whom Art Bensen suddenly found himself in his new wonderful world of our beautiful Adirondack mountains of Northern New York State, and its about some very unusual people whom Frontier Town brought here to the Adirondacks and its about our beautiful Adirondacks.

I was one of those mountain people whom Art found here when he suddenly appeared among us in 1951. I was among the first in the region to whom Art provided employment and I am the very last of the original employees still on the job at Frontier Town. Working at Frontier Town has made it possible for me to serve my parishioners without pay in this disadvantaged area. These are people who cannot afford to support a pastor.

In 1951 I saw Art move into the horse stall of what was left of the old Wathsock barn. (See back cover.) I saw Art's neighbors for miles around laugh at this "Crazy Daniel Boon from New York City" when he told them he was going to build a Frontier Town that would draw thousands of tourists to the old Wathsock farm here in this tiny remote hamlet of North Hudson. I saw Art and his partners, Ed. Ovensen and Mack Andersen, design and build the Daniel Boon log town, the cowboy town, rodeo arena, railroad, animal park, lumber mill, grist mill, restaurants, motels, roads, airport—everything—into a unique tourist attraction where visitors find it fun to see and participate in history in action.

For more than a quarter of a century I've seen the economic benefits from Frontier Town flow into our community in the form of millions of dollars in wages, high real estate revenues from land, which when Art came here produced practically nothing, large sales tax revenues and the other benefits which result from an influx of tourists.

I have seen Frontier Town make it possible for hundreds of local youngsters to attend college. These are young people who would never have any hope of college had not Frontier Town provided jobs for them.

As I look around Frontier Town today and remember what these premises looked like the day I saw Art move into the old horse stall I can scarcely believe my eyes.

I believe everyone will enjoy this easy reading book with its chuckles scattered here and there. If you are among the many who, like Art, long to get out of the rut of a routine job and the rat race of the city and out into the country where you can fulfill some long hoped for dream, this book will have even greater appeal.

JAMES MATHERLY

# Chapter One

## I FIND MY "PROMISED LAND"

My hope of finding a suitable site for my Frontier Town was fading fast that evening of the 4th of July 1951 as John Koller and I drove down Route 9 and turned onto the old black top road leading to the abandoned Wathsock farm. After months of unsuccessful searching I now found myself only 20 miles from Pottersville, New York, near the southern edge of the Adirondacks. I had decided that if, by the time I reached Pottersville, I had not found a suitable location for my Frontier Town, I would have no choice but to give up that dream of mine and go back to work installing telephones in New York City.

My spirits picked up a bit as we paused a moment to take in the magnificent view of the high peaks of the Adirondacks to the west. We turned down a dirt road and suddenly burst out into one of the most lovely valleys I have ever seen. It consisted of a large area of cleared level land. Flowing through it, at the far edge where the mountains began to rise, was the lovely Schroon River about 150 feet wide and sparkling clear. The whole picture was framed by a majestic forest covered mountain backdrop.

I drove slowly over the level land, inspecting it carefully. In a short time, I concluded that this site could not have been better prepared for my Frontier Town had I designed it myself. Not one bit of earth shaping would be required before construction could begin. At last I had found my "promised land."

Parenthetically, during the more than a quarter of a century that has since transpired, I have visited just about every tourist attraction in the United States and Canada. As far as natural beauty is concerned, Frontier Town's setting in the beautiful Adirondacks is unsurpassed.

But back to the beginning of my story. My father had been in the building business on Staten Island, New York City. In the great depression, his business simply evaporated. Shortly afterwards, he became ill and died. As the oldest boy at home, on my telephone installer's salary of $18 per week, I was left as the main support for my mother and six brothers and sisters. An older sister, Florence, was earning $12 a week in a delicatessen store and my brother, Ken, earned $65 a month on a boat in New York Harbor. Somehow we managed to see our family through those tough times.

After a while, my salary increased and with a very small down payment, I bought a couple of houses and a delicatessen store which my sister decided she would like to run. Before long, the houses and the store were paying themselves off.

After a few years, I got to fooling around with home movies and devised a camera attached floodlight which was very simple but which worked very well. All of my friends wanted them and urged me to put them on the market. I bought a power press, had some dies made, rented space in a machine shop and went into production. When I went to order boxes, I was informed that the minimum order was 20,000. So I swallowed hard and ordered 20,000 boxes. I hired my brother, Edgar, who had just come out of the service, to run this operation. Before imitators with better production and distribution took over, we had made and sold 20,000 Bensen Lights and wasted $5,000 on a patent. By the way, if any of my readers have an idea about patenting something, my advice is "don't." It is almost impossible to get claims broad enough to provide protection. Even if you do get a patent with broad claims, patent litigation can be long drawn out and is very expensive. But that's a story in itself.

When the last youngster in the family had grown up and found a job, I was at last free to have a try at building my long dreamed of Frontier Town, a tourist attraction where visitors could participate in the action and experience life as it was in the old days. My sister and brother both got better jobs so I liquidated all my assets and found that I had $40,000 to work with.

I removed the back seat of my 1951 Chevrolet sedan, installed a bed, bought myself a tiny Primus cook stove and began looking for a site on which to build my Frontier Town. I was still working for the Telephone Company, of course, so every Friday night at quitting time, I would jump into my car and head out on my search. First I tried Connecticut, then New Hampshire, then Vermont, all without success. I then took one of my three weeks of vacation and searched the Williamsburg Peninsula, also without success. I went back to work for a week, then took another week of my vacation and went to Florida, traveling fast and light, living right in the car. Again I failed to find the kind of site I needed. So once again I went back to work, rather discouraged.

I had just one more place to look. It was in the Adirondack Mountain area of northern New York State. I had become slightly acquainted with the Adirondacks having been there skiing with a church group. I had never been there in the summer time.

I spread a map of the Adirondacks on the living room floor of our little house on Staten Island, studied it carefully, and I decided that I would begin at the northern edge of the Adirondacks on the St. Lawrence River and work my way south to Pottersville, New York. If I failed to find a spot by the time I reached Pottersville, near the southern border of the Adirondacks, I would have to give up the whole idea and continue installing telephones in New York City.

I took the last week of my vacation, left on a Saturday morning and headed north with a prayer: "Lord, if you've got some place up there in the Adirondacks for my Frontier Town, lead me to it."

The idea of asking God's leading in life's decisions has been the norm for me ever since as a boy of fourteen, through a Sunday school teacher I was confronted with the claim of Jesus Christ that he was not just an important historical figure, but was as he claimed to be The Son of God who came to this earth to give his life as a ransom for such as I. I invited him into my life as Savior and Lord. This was the best and most important decision I have ever made. He has eliminated fear of death and He has brought peace and purpose into my life. I love Him with all of my heart and I heartily recommend Him to all who are looking for a life with meaning.

But back to my story.

I arrived at Alexandria Bay on the St. Lawrence River that evening. I took the next day off for a sight-seeing boat trip around the Thousand Islands and early Monday morning started down the road investigating every piece of land offered for sale which might possibly be used for my Frontier Town. By Wednesday evening I had found nothing suitable and I had arrived at the little town of North Hudson, just 20 miles north of Pottersville, which was my give up point.

Pretty discouraged now, I stopped at a gas station and asked about highway property for sale. The man directed me down the road to his son, John Koller, who showed me a nice level piece of property which, however, had a depth of only about 200 feet. As we stood there in the woods on his land I said, "Mr. Koller, this is a lovely piece of ground, but you see thousands and thousands of people will be coming to the Frontier Town that I'm going to build and this just isn't big enough." You should have seen the look he gave me. There we were in this little town of North Hudson, which turned out to have a voting population of about 100. It was obvious that he thought I was crazy. Incidentally,

North Hudson has about 100 voters who cast their ballots and hold their town meetings here in the town hall.

Koller's price at that time was $2,000 for the 20 acres. Recently, we paid him $100,000 for his property. Which gives an idea what Frontier Town has done for real estate values in the area.

I then asked Mr. Koller, "Do you know of any other land for sale around here?" And he said, "Well, the old Wathsock farm next door is for sale." And I said, "How about showing it to me?" And so it was that John Koller got into my car that evening and led me to my "promised land."

When I learned from Koller that the land was owned by Ernest Wathsock, who lived in Schroon Lake, I immediately took him home and, although it was getting close to sunset, I went down the road 8 miles to Schroon Lake and picked up Mr. Wathsock. He showed me the boundaries and told me all about the property. It was 100 acres in size—even larger and better than I had realized.

We drove back to his cottage at Schroon Lake and as we sat in the car in the dark outside his house discussing the property, I asked him how much he wanted for the farm. He said hesitatingly, "$2,000." Well, it so happened that $2,000 was exactly the amount I had allocated for the purchase of a site and I was carrying that $2,000 in a mayonnaise jar under the driver's seat of my car. However, I said, "How about $1,800, cash?" I knew he had been trying to sell that property for some time.

Town Store
WEARING APPAREL

Schroon Lake is a typical Adirondack Village with a population of 1500. This is more than doubled by the influx of vacationers during the summer. It is located on U.S. 9, 8 miles south of Frontier Town. Here's a view of main street in the fall after the summer people have departed. Moe Friedman's office is indicated by the arrow . .

This was evidenced by a weather beaten "For Sale" sign which the weeds had almost obscured. You see, property wasn't in demand in North Hudson in those days. Ernest said, "Just a moment, let me go in and talk to my wife." In a little while he came out and said, "My wife says O.K., providing we can retain two acres along the river there, which is the finest spot I know of for landlocked salmon fishing." I said, "Mr. Wathsock, if I'm going to buy that property, I must have all of it." He said, "Just a minute," and back he went into the house. He soon came out again and said, "My wife says O.K. I'll meet you tomorrow at lunchtime at Moe Freedman's office in Schroon Lake and pass the title over to you." (By the way, Mrs. Wathsock works in our restaurant gift shop and has been in our employ for many years.) I agreed, went back to the Wathsock place, pulled my car into the drive-in portion of the old barn which was made for unloading hay, climbed into the car bed and went to sleep.

The next morning I got to thinking that before I bought Mr. Wathsocks' property I ought to have a search and survey made. I went down to see Moe Freedman at his office about 10:00 A.M. Moe's office turned out to be a porcelain kitchen table in the rear room of his father's dry-goods store where Moe, who had not long before been admitted to the Bar, supplemented his lawyer's income with a salesman's job in the store. Moe's legal practice and real estate business has grown over the years so that his office now occupies the large store in its entirety.

Moe suggested that I sign a purchase contract when Ernest came in at noontime and he would get started on a search and survey. Ernest showed up on time and readily agreed to the purchase contract.

# Chapter Two

# CONSTRUCTION OF FRONTIER TOWN GETS UNDERWAY

Right there in Mr. Freedman's office when I signed the purchase contract I asked Ernest Wathsock if he knew of any lumberjacks who were available to help me cut logs and build my log buildings. He immediately recommended Jim Liberty, who he said lived in North Hudson. He said that Jim Liberty was the finest lumberjack and carpenter around and he added, "Jim knows more about building log buildings than Daniel Boone or Abe Lincoln because he has built more log buildings than they did. Jim has spent most of his life working in the lumber woods and every time a lumber camp moves to a new location, they build new log buildings for the lumberjacks to live in."

Ernest went back to work at Drake's Lumbermill there in Schroon Lake and I went to find Jim Liberty. Jim a rather small 55-year-old man of French Canadian decent, and John Gero were finishing a cabin on Cortney Pond in the woods about six miles north of the Wathsock farm.

Louis Hozley's general store and post office North Hudson, N.Y.

I explained to Jim what I had in mind and he said, "Sounds good, I'd like to get in on that," and began to put his tools away. I said, "Now wait a minute, I don't want to hire you away from someone else. Perhaps you can get me some other lumberjacks who can get me started and then you can join us as soon as you finish this job." He said, "Gero can finish this. There's only a little bit left to be done. He'll take care of that and I'll get started with you." I couldn't stop him, so he packed his tools in the car and followed me down the road to the Wathsock farm, which he was familiar with.

I gave him an outline of what I had in mind. Now I had no blueprints to work with or drawings of any kind, but I had done research in the New York Public Library and I knew what I was going to do. When I told him we would need four more lumberjacks, he said, "If you'll come with me this evening when the men will be home, we'll go around and visit them and I can get you four good men pretty quickly." That evening I picked him up at his house. He lived about a mile north of the Wathsock farm on the main road in a little cottage owned by Louis Hozley, who owned the general store. Jim's cottage was right next to the store.

So we set out to hire four more lumberjacks. It was most interesting to visit them in their cabins, hidden away in the hills of North Hudson. Most of them were using oil lamps. This was a new frontier in my experience and New York City seemed far, far away. We had no trouble in hiring four additional lumberjacks that evening, including one by the name of Fred Nolet, who had a skidding horse which Jim said would be needed to drag the logs out of the woods to the construction site.

The next morning, Jim, his four lumberjacks and the horse showed up at 7:00 A.M. Soon the sound of double bladed axes began to ring out in that clear mountain air.

I was busy that morning laying out my buildings. I staked out the block house (which was always the first building to be built in a new frontier settlement), the church, the schoolhouse, the stable, the glassblower's shop, the leather carver's shop, the canteen (refreshment stand), the trading post, the weaver's shop, the frontier home, and the building at the entrance to our parking lot; twelve log buildings in all.

By noon, I had finished staking out my buildings, so after lunch I attached a chain to the rear bumper of my Chevy and began to work along with Fred Nolet, skidding the logs out to the building site. That new 1951 Chevy of mine delivered just as many logs as the horse did.

Thus it was that on July 6th, 1951, the day after I signed the purchase contract and before I actually owned the old Wathsock farm, that at the age of 38 I began construction of my long dreamed of Frontier Town.

I worked with the lumberjacks all the rest of that week. Each evening I would park my car in the old hay unloading portion of the old barn and sleep in the car.

I ate my meals on the concrete steps across the road from the barn that led to the burned out farm house.

Breakfast consisted of eggs, bread and butter, and milk. For lunch, I had a can of soup and sandwiches of cold cuts, sardines, tuna fish or cheese, and milk. For supper, I had Dinty Moore stew, Chef Boyardee meatballs and spaghetti or frankfurters and beans with canned fruit for dessert, plus milk. (I don't happen to like coffee. In this, I'm a disgrace to my Norwegian relatives and friends, who are said to have coffee instead of blood in their veins.)

That Saturday evening I was sitting on my steps enjoying my supper when down the road walked a rather tall slim elderly man who came up to me and said, "My name is Herb Proctor and I live right across the highway. I have come to find out what you're going to do about my potatoes." Now I had noticed that there were about six rows of tiny plants right in the center of the area where I had staked out my ducking pool. They had hardly broken through the ground. I did not know what they were. Evidently these were Herb's potato plants. He said, "Ernest Wathsock gave me permission to plant those potatoes there and the law says that what a man plants, he has a right to harvest. No one can interfere with those potato plants until they're ready for harvest." Well, here was a problem. If Herb was going to demand that his potato plants be left untouched until they had matured, we couldn't build that summer, which meant that we would not be able to open the next spring.

I was still working for the Telephone Company and had to be back at work the following Monday and this matter had to be resolved without delay. I said, "Let me look Ernest up and find out what this is all about. I'm sure "we can work something out." Said Herb, "It better be worked out," and up the road he went.

The next morning I hadn't yet climbed out of my car bed when I found a man about 30 years of age tapping on my window and demanding, "What are you going to do about my old man's potatoes?" I said, "I'm going to look up Ernest Wathsock and we'll come to see you as soon as I can find him."

I rushed through breakfast and headed down the road to find Ernest. His wife told me that he was out fishing on Schroon Lake. I hired an outboard motorboat and chased around the lake looking for him. Schroon Lake is nine miles long but I finally found him and when I told him about the problem, he immediately pulled in his line and came with me.

Ernest was a big, husky fellow with a perpetual smile. He was loved by everyone. He said, "Don't be too troubled about this. Herb's my brother-in-law. When he married my sister, my father gave them a piece of the farm. It's about one acre that he owns, across the road from you. You'll find him the best neighbor you've got. He's got a gruff way about him and so does his son, Freddie, but you'll find them okay. Of course, he never asked me about planting those potatoes, but we will work it out okay."

When we got to Proctor's place, Herb and his son, Fred, were both there and the negotiations began. Herb pounding his fists and Ernest listening in his quiet way. Finally, Ernest said, "Now, Herb, when those potatoes mature, how many do you think you're going to have there?" Herb replied promptly, "Twelve bushels." I thought that was rather a high estimate for the few plants I had seen. Nevertheless, Ernest said, "Okay, Herb, next fall I'll give you twelve bushels of potatoes." That settled the problem and I was free now to go back to New York City, assured that my new project was not going to be held up by potato trouble.

Ernest's prediction was correct. Both Herb Proctor and his son, Fred, proved to be good neighbors. Herb was an expert in locating surveyor's stakes which marked the corners of property lines. He helped me many times in locating the boundaries of land parcels I was interested in buying.

He helped me in other ways, too. When well experts were unable to find water for a well I needed to supply our office, old Herb cut a forked branch from the apple tree in his back yard for use as a divining rod and located water for me in about 15 minutes.

He lost his temper one time, some years later, though, and I don't blame him. Herb had permitted my elderly friend, Lena Stillwell, one of our retired employees, who lives on our premises in a mobile home next to him, to connect on to his water supply.

One day a friend of our rodeo announcer, Clarence Canary, came up the road with a load of elephants belonging to Mr. Hamid, who runs the Steel Pier in Atlantic City, New Jersey. They were early for an engagement in Montreal and they needed a place to lay over for a few days. Mack Andersen gave them permission to stay on our premises and without saying a word to Lena, told them to set up camp next to Lena's mobile home. I was in Montreal that day and arrived back in my apartment just in time to hear the phone ring. It was Lena, "Arthur, what are you going to do about them elephants?" "Elephants?" said I, "I didn't know we had any elephants." Said Lena, "I didn't know it either until this big van pulled into my door yard and began to unload ten big elephants. Won't you come over and see what you can do?" I went over there and found the elephants tied to a chain anchored in the ground. The trouble had arisen when the elephant trainer had connected a hose to an outlet on Lena's mobile home and began to water his elephants. It didn't take long for this to drain Herb Proctor's water supply down so he couldn't get any water. His solution was simple—shut off the line to Lena's trailer. When I came on the scene, the elephant trainer was pacing up and down very worried. He had to have water for his elephants. Lena was standing on her porch, ringing her hands and old Herb was calmly leaning against a tree with a look of smug satisfaction on his face. I approached Herb and asked him if he could tell me what it was all about. He did that in no uncertain terms. "I promised water for Lena. I didn't promise water for no elephants."

I told the trainer to load his elephants back into his van and I'd show him the most beautiful elephant camping grounds he had ever seen. He followed me to a lovely clearing alongside our airport, next to the river where there was lots of room to park his vehicles, lots of shaded area in which to stake out his elephants, and the entire Schroon River for the elephants not only to drink from, but also for them to swim in. They stayed for over a week. My mother loved animals and every evening I had to take her down to watch the elephants swimming. The water was deep enough for even the largest elephant to go entirely under and they would splash around, blow streams of water out of their trunks and roll completely over in the water. I'm sure they never before or since have enjoyed such deluxe camping facilities. Anyway, as soon as the elephants had left Lena's yard, Herb Proctor turned Lena's water supply back on.

But back to my story. I was still working for the New York Telephone Company so for the following four weeks, I returned every weekend to Frontier Town to lay out work for the men and pay them, keeping Social Security and withholding records, etc.

## I LEAVE THE TELEPHONE COMPANY AFTER 21 YEARS

Finally, of course, I realized that the time had come for me to make the break with the Telephone Company, the only job I had ever had and where I had spent 21 years of my life. It was a big step for me. I knew I was leaving security for insecurity.

In those days, it was almost sacrilegious to think of leaving Ma Bell. In all my 21 years, I had never met anyone who had quit. They had a saying then that your name was not dry on the books until you had 30 years of service. Some of the men I worked with had 50 years of service and more. So when I informed my foreman, Waldo Gass, that I was leaving, he told me to take a week off with pay and I would get over this crazy idea and forget all about it. When I finally convinced him that I already had men up there working for me and that I just had to go, he wanted to know whether I had a grudge against him for he said, "How am I going to explain to my boss that you're leaving? This has never happened to me before." He finally sent me to his boss, Herman Hager, who repeated the performance, and then sent me to his boss. I explained to all of them that I hoped I would be permitted to come back to my job in case my great adventure failed, but I just had to give this a try to get it out of my system. I was assured that my job would be waiting should I go broke and have to go back to installing telephones.

So it was that at the beginning of August, 1951, that after 21 years I left the Telephone Company with no pension, no severance pay, and no unemployment insurance.

I fixed up the room in the old Wathsock barn that formerly had housed their horses, moved in and went back to work with the lumberjacks. Soon, under the tutoring of Jim Liberty, I could handle the double bladed axe without too much danger to my feet and legs. By fall we had completed our twelve log buildings.

I had intended to close down the job until the following spring, but after looking the old barn over very carefully one weekend, I found that its timbers were sound and the building was in the right location for our office. So I decided to rebuild the old barn into an office with living quarters above. I paid off our four lumberjacks but retained Jim Liberty who was also a carpenter and I hired Jim Matherly.

## JIM MATHERLY

Jim Matherly was an ordained minister who had come from Long Island to live in the Adirondacks years before I came on the scene. He soon noticed that there were many people living in the mountains who attended no church. He also knew that these people were having a tough time earning a living and could contribute little toward the support of a church. Nothing daunted, Jim got permission to use a church in Schroon Lake that had been closed for years. He rounded up a few friends to teach Sunday School classes and in a short time had a thriving

During the winter of 1951-52 Jim Liberty, Jim Matherly and I converted the old Wathsock barn (see photo back cover) into an office with a comfortable apartment on the second floor which was formerly the hay mow. I was married in 1973 and now live here when Frontier Town is open, with my wife Edna.

Sunday School of over 50 children going strong. Jim and the other teachers used their own cars to pick the children up.

Jim is an electrician, carpenter and all around handyman. I met him the first. Sunday after I bought the Wathsock farm when I attended the Sunday morning service in his church. He was at that time working for a summer camp as a maintenance man. I attended his church regularly that summer so from the very beginning he has been intimately acquainted with Frontier Town. At the end of the summer he was laid off from his camp job and I hired him to help Jim Liberty and me rebuild the old Wathsock barn into an office and living quarters. Jim is still working for Frontier Town. He is the very last of the employees I hired at the beginning.

Jim served the church as pastor for over 20 years and is still busy serving the spiritual and physical needs of those hill country people, visiting them in their homes and often helping out with food and clothing at his own expense. He has done a great work among these people who love, respect and trust him.

Our first task in renovating the old barn was to quickly replace the missing sideboards and install a second floor for the apartment we planned to build into the hayloft. It was now late in the fall and we had to hurry because winter comes on with a rush in that country. Soon we had finished closing the building in, installed a flight of stairs, put in the second floor and installed a big kerosene heater. Now let the snow fly and let the winds howl! We would be snug as bugs in a rug all winter long as we completed our office downstairs and our apartment upstairs.

# Chapter Three

# I GET TO KNOW MY ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN NEIGHBORS

This was one of the most enjoyable times of my life. It was during that winter of 1951-1952 that I had ample opportunity to gain an understanding of the Adirondacks and of the people who lived in these mountains. I found I was in a new world. Most people including New York State residents, are unaware that in northern New York State, outlined on all road maps, is the six million acre Adirondack Park which is larger than any state or national park in the United States. It is larger than Yellowstone, Grand Canyon, Glacier and Olympic National Parks combined and it is larger than the State of Connecticut and larger than the State of New Jersey. About two and one-half million acres of the six million acres are owned by the State of New York. The remainder is owned privately, but all six million acres were under the supervision of the New York State Conservation Department, which controlled hunting, fishing and lumbering on both State and private lands and provided public

Barton Mines, the world's largest producer of garnet are located southwest of Frontier Town near North Creek. They produce 80% of the world's supply. This is the oldest continuous mining operation in N.Y. State and the second oldest continuous mining operation in the U.S. Sandpaper produced from this garnet is of the highest quality because no mattter how small they are crushed the crystals never have a blunt or worn edge. Garnet is also used in jewelry. It is the official gem stone of N.Y. State. The mines are open to tourists.

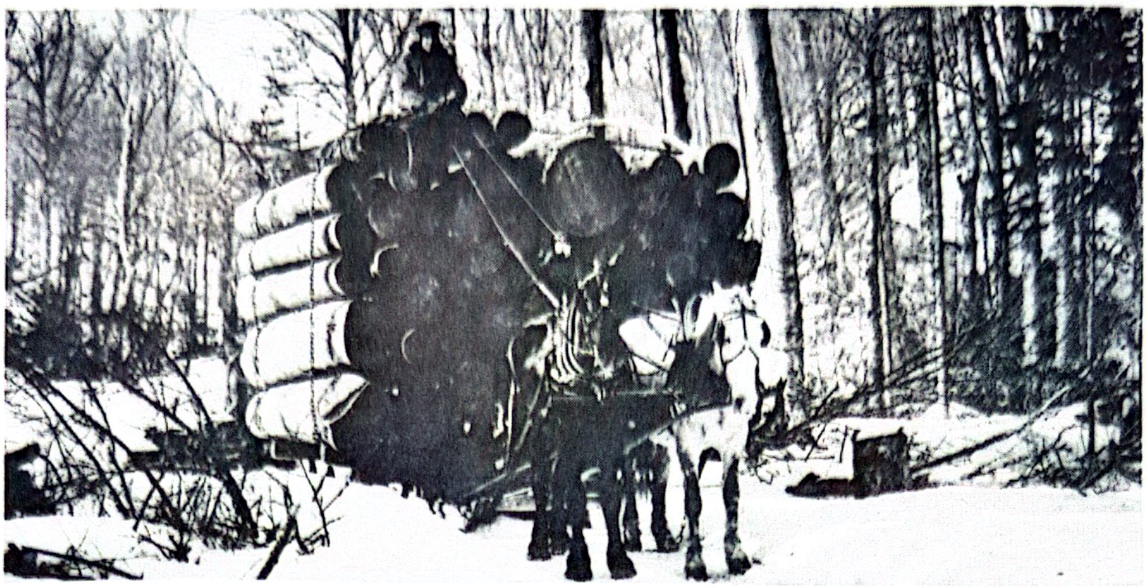
campsites on the State owned land. A glance at any road map will show that Frontier Town is located in the Adirondack Park about midway between Lake George, 40 miles to the south, and Lake Placid, 40 miles to the north. Both Lake George and Lake Placid are well known tourist centers but the people in the Frontier Town area were almost completely untouched by outsiders. They were the real Adirondack mountaineers. Most of them earned their living by working in the woods, cutting pulp wood for the paper mills or logs for the sawmills. Some worked in the open pit titanium mines of the National Lead Company at the Village of Tahawus in the mountains, 25 miles to the west of Frontier Town, or in the deep mines of the Republic Steel Company at Mineville, about 25 miles east of Frontier Town.

It was these mountain people I found myself living among that winter of 1951-1952 and getting to know them and their way of living was one of the outstanding experiences of my life.

This is the Republic Steel Company's mining plant at Mineville, N.Y. The tall building in the background is the main mine shaft. The iron ore produced here from the historic Moriah ore beds is of very high quality. Republic Steel gave us two thousand tons of this historic Moriah iron ore for use in demonstrating our bloomery forge. The plant is easily visible to tourists from the streets of Mineville.

While I was confident from the very beginning that Frontier Town was going to draw vast numbers of visitors, I gave no thought as to where the personnel to serve all these people would come from. I had never heard of Mineville, yet when we needed them, so many people from Mineville appeared looking for work that we had our choice of people for every job we needed to fill, except of course for the trained performers whom we brought in from all over the country. So I can't take credit for that labor supply, it proves once again that the Lord helps those who are not smart enough to help themselves. Our visitors are surprised at the high quality of employees we have even though we are located far out in the country. It is these wonderful people who have made Frontier Town successful.

Jim Liberty, Jim Matherly and I were snug and comfortable as we worked every day on the interior of our office and apartment that tough winter of 1952, when the temperatures went down to almost 50° below zero and as much as three feet of snow would fall in one night. However, in my off hours, I made it a point to mix as much as possible with the local people. I met them daily at the Post Office which was in Louis Hozley's general store and I often visited them in their homes. I knew, of course, that I was the laughing stock of the whole region; that behind my back they were saying, "Where did this Crazy Daniel Boone from New York City ever get the idea that anyone would ever come to see those log buildings he has put up on the old Wathsock place?" But they were nice to my face and gladly answered my questions and they welcomed me into their homes.



(Schroon Lake Historical Society Photo)

Most of my Adirondack neighbors have spent years working in the lumber woods. Here's a load of logs that were dropped on the ice of Elk Lake, and the following spring were floated down the Schroon River to the sawmill at Glens Falls.

In the old days, most of the old timers had worked in the lumber woods and their pattern of living at that time was something like this: At the beginning of winter, they would be hired by a lumberman and put up in lumber camps deep in the woods where all winter they would cut logs and transport them on horse drawn sleds out on to the thick ice of the frozen lakes. In the spring, they would drive the logs down the river, through what is now Frontier Town to the sawmills at Glens Falls, 50 miles to the south. When the river driving was finished, they would return to their farms, plant their gardens and take care of their animals. Some of them had sheep. All of them had a hog or two. They all had chickens and most of them had an ox for their winter supply of beef. In the fall, of course, hunting was the important thing. It seemed to me that these folks lived for their hunting. They, of course, are expert hunters. Many hunters came into the area from the cities during the hunting season and many of the local men are hired as hunting guides.

Some of the old timers were still using muzzle loaders. Jim Liberty told me about one of these neighbors. Said Jim "old Joe always keeps his old muzzle loader standing fully loaded right next to the kitchen door in case some venison on the hoof comes by.

(G S Shaughnessy Photo)

Sure footed river drivers ride logs in the Aridondacks. When I arrived in North Hudson in 1951 most of my neighbors had worked at driving logs down the Schroon River, through what is now Frontier Town, to the lumber mills at Glens Falls, 50 miles to the south. Many lives were lost in this dangerous work.

One night his son Eddie came home drunk as usual. He thought he saw a buck out there in a dark so he grabbed the old gun and took a shot at it. He missed, of course. Knowing that his father wanted that gun ready for action at all times, Eddie reloaded but he didn't measure the powder very accurately. In fact, he poured half the contents of the powder flask down the barrel. The next day the old man decided to take a shot at a rabbit hopping by but when he pulled the trigger that old muzzle loader kicked him clear across the kitchen floor and he wound up under the sewing machine."

I didn't know much about muzzle loaders until we equipped ourselves with some at Frontier Town. They are called muzzle loaders, of course, because the powder and shot are put into the end, or muzzle of the barrel and pushed down to the bottom with a ramrod.

As a kid in school I learned that a flintlock was the gun used during the American Revolution but I didn't know just what a flintlock was nor did I know that some of the expressions we use every day come from the old flintlock.

This gun consists of three basic parts. The barrel is like a piece of pipe through which the bullet passes. The stock is the wooden part held against the shooter's shoulder. The lock is the firing mechanism.

The lock consists of a trigger, a hammer which holds a piece of flint, the frizzen which when struck by the flint produces a spark, and the pan. The pan is a small metal hollowed-out shelf attached to the right side of the barrel. There is a small hole which runs from the pan through the side of the barrel into the chamber where the powder lodges when pushed down with the ramrod.

After the gun has been loaded through the muzzle a very small quantity of powder is put into the pan. The hammer holding the flint is pulled back and locks back until the trigger is pulled. Now the gun is ready to fire.

When the trigger is pulled the hammer flies forward striking the frizzen and dropping sparks into the powder in the pan setting it off. The flash singes the shooters eyebrows and sends a flame through the hole into the powder in the barrel causing the powder to explode and expel the bullet from the barrel.

## COMMON EXPRESSIONS COME FROM THE OLD FLINTLOCK

Sometimes the powder in the pan burned but failed to ignite the powder inside the barrel so we had "just a flash in the pan."

Sometimes after "just a flash in the pan" the user stood the gun in a corner intending at a later time to clean out the hole leading to the powder inside the barrel. A moment or so later the gun went off and the shooter would say that the gun was "hanging fire."

Sometimes the owner would accidentally break the wooden part. He would go to a gunsmith and have him make a new stock. Sometimes the firing mechanism would wear out and he bought a new lock. Sometimes the barrel had to be replaced and he bought a new barrel. However, when he found his faithful old flintlock was beyond repair he bought a whole new gun "lock, stock, and barrel."

Every muzzle loader carried a ramrod. To be effective in ramming down the charge a ramrod had to be very rigid—hence the expression "stiff as a ramrod."

## WINTER WEATHER FORECASTING

Late in the fall was slaughtering time and practically every family had at least one pig to be slaughtered and it was then that they received advance information as to the severity of the winter they were facing. This is how it worked: As soon as the pig had been killed, they immediately examined the organ which they called the "meld" or "melt." No one could ever spell it for me and I don't know just which organ it was—they couldn't explain that either. I think it was the spleen. If the meld was long and narrow, they said that indicated that the winter would be long but rather mild. If the meld was thick at the beginning and tapered toward the end, it would indicate that the winter would be severe at the beginning and mild toward the end. If the meld were thick all the way through, they knew they were facing a very long hard winter. Believe it or not these predictions proved to be quite accurate.

## ELECTIONEERING—ADIRONDACK STYLE

Another activity in the fall of the year was politics. As far as I have been able to find out, North Hudson, while very large in size, must be about the smallest town voter-wise, in the State of New York, that elects its own officials. There is a lively election every two years. With special elections and other questions that have to be submitted to the voters, we are voting on something just about every fall. As I mentioned above, there are only about 100 voters in North Hudson. In every election, each family seems to have someone running for some office. The result is that North Hudson elections are hotly contested.

My introduction to North Hudson politics and its electioneering methods came that first fall. Jim Matherly and Jim Liberty, who were working with me on the apartment, had left for the day and I had just finished my supper and with the radio keeping me company, was doing

(Adirondack Museum Photo)

The Adirondack Museum is located on this 30-acre site high on the shoulder of Blue Mountain, overlooking Blue Mountain Lake, New York, 200 feet below. Within the 22-building complex are exhibited boats, trains, horse-drawn vehicles, paintings, photographs, lumbering tools and many other objects illustrating "Man's Relationship to the Adirondacks." The new Road and Rail Transportation Building, fully open to the public for the first time in 1970, can be seen in the upper portio of the picture.

some electrical work when up the stairs came one of my mountaineer neighbors, in rough Adirondack winter attire. She carried, tray fashion, the cover of a Hershey chocolate bar box about 12 inches by 18 inches by 2 inches high. This box cover contained five cent Hershey bars, Baby Ruth's, Mounds, Tootsie Rolls and bags of peanuts. She informed me that she was running for the office of Dog Enumerator. I think this job paid $50.00 a year. Very politely she offered me my choice of her goodies and said she would appreciate my support in the coming election. As I recall, I selected peanuts which I munched while she soberly listed her qualifications for Dog Enumerator. I heard her out without committing myself and she left.

The next day when my North Hudson advisor, Jim Liberty, came to work, I sought his political advice. He told me that until I had seen the game of politics as played in North Hudson, I hadn't seen anything. He added that Tammany Hall in New York City could learn from North Hudson. He said, "Art, you must keep in mind that practically everybody in this town is related and some bitter family feuds have developed over politics. You did just the right thing in not promising your vote. Listen to them all and don't tell anyone how you are going to vote on anything." I found by experience that he was absolutely correct. When I questioned him about the five cent candy bars, never having been outside the Adirondacks, he didn't see anything strange about that. He had never known anything different and thought that is the way politicians everywhere did their electioneering. He informed me that all the candidates carried bottles of booze in their cars and discreetly managed to slip a bit of liquid inducement to the man of the house if he were adroit enough to make contact without being caught by his wife. Jim also informed me that in case of close contests, the cash price per vote had gone as high as $20.00 at that time.

Yes, politics is one of the most important Adirondack fall activities. Before Election Day, I was visited by candidates for the offices of supervisor, road commissioner, assessor, town clerk, justice of the peace, councilmen, et cetera. As I recall, my supply of five cent candies lasted me for about two months.

## ICE HARVESTING IN THE ADIRONDACKS

One of the most interesting winter activities was the cutting of blocks of ice in the lakes for use in the ice refrigerators the following summer. This was generally a community effort where everyone would get together, mark out the ice, cut it and then load the trucks or the wagons which would carry the blocks of ice to the ice houses on each farm where they were packed in sawdust for keeping until the following summer. Even when I came on the scene in 1951, many of my neighbors were out of reach of the powerline which ran along the main highway and therefore had no electric refrigeration. As a matter of fact, it was only in 1948, three years before I came to North Hudson, that the powerline had come up the road. Up to that time, all of North Hudson's residents used ice cut on local ponds.

These days, the only ice harvesting in North Hudson is done at Frontier Town. Here's a report that appeared in the Albany Times Union in 1976 that tells about it.

## A WINTER'S HARVEST

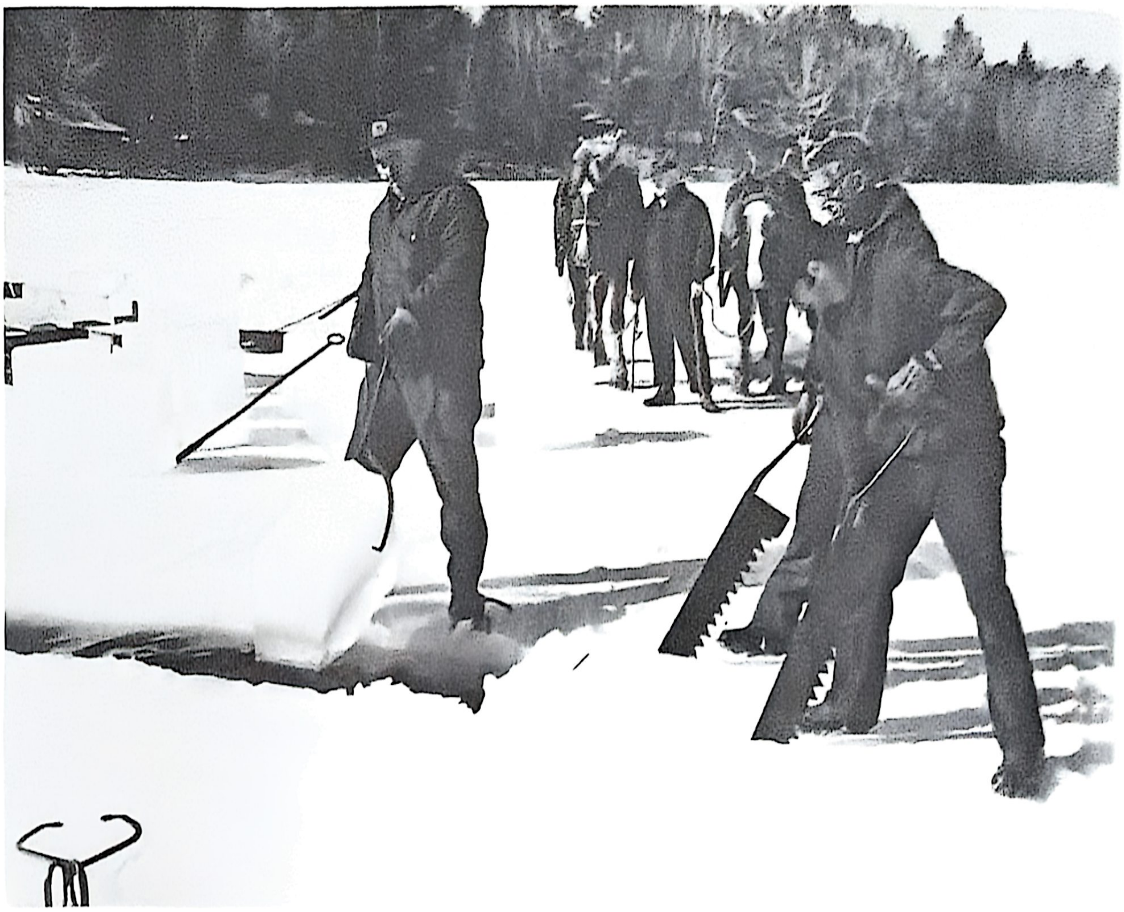
Frontier Town, Adirondack Mt. Park, N.Y.
August 10, 1976

Great strides in the development of our modern day civilization were in many cases brought about by the efforts of one person. As we look back into the history of our country, we note that steam power had its Fulton, cotton had its Whitney, and ice had its Tudor. Ice has its Tudor? Yes, Frederic Tudor.

In his way, Frederic Tudor changed the customs of mankind as much as any American before or since. As the world's first iceman, he shipped ice in sailing ships all over the world. He popularized the iced drink.

Tudor was a Boston shipping clerk at thirteen; at 22 he sailed to the West Indies and, baked by the tropical heat, thought fondly of the thick ice on his father's pond back in Saugus, Massachusetts. If only he had some of that ice right now, to cool the drink he held in his hand. Why not ship ice here to Martinique, to Cuba, to any hot place in the world?

Back in Boston, of course, they laughed at him. Nobody had ever sold ice; hence, nobody ever could. But Tudor did. It meant years of persevering struggle during which he built special ships, hit upon pine sawdust as the best insulator, tied up the ice rights in dozens of ponds around Boston, built icehouses all over the tropics, created a market, and then met the demand. In 1826 he shipped 4,000 tons of ice; by 1836 his



Cutting ice to be stored in Frontier Town's ice house in our Frontiers of Industry

cargoes were traveling as far as Calcutta, where a Parsi asked the captain if this strange stuff grew on trees or on shrubs. In 1849 Tudor was indisputably the world's Ice King, shipping 150,000 tons per year to the East and West Indies, South America, San Francisco and even to Persia.

At Walden Pont, Thoreau watched Tudor's workmen cut the ice and reflected "that the sweltering inhabitants of Charleston and New Orleans, of Madras and Bombay and Calcutta, drink at my well . . . The pure Walden water is mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges."

There isn't much harvesting of ice these days. The electric refrigerator changed all that . . . But the nostalgia of the past was brought back to life this winter when the men at Frontier Town, an Americana attraction in New York State's Adirondack Mt. Park broke out the tools and equipment, shod the horses, and harvested 25 tons of ice for the icehouse in Frontier Town. And it was cut and harvested just about the same way and with the same tools as was used by that Ice-Tycoon Tudor. Large hand saws and long tongs and chisels, horses and sleds were used but the most ingenious gadget was an "ice-plow" that was pulled by a team of horses to make the deep straight cuts in the lake ice. Without this ice-plow it probably would not have been possible for Tudor to cut his 150,000 tons of ice.

The Ice-House is one of the newest additions to the Frontiers of Industry at Frontier Town and was added because it was an important part of life in the old days. And also, no other Americana attraction had one. Since we were fortunate to have the ice equipment, horses and men with the know-how, we thought we might as well take in the harvest just like Tudor did.

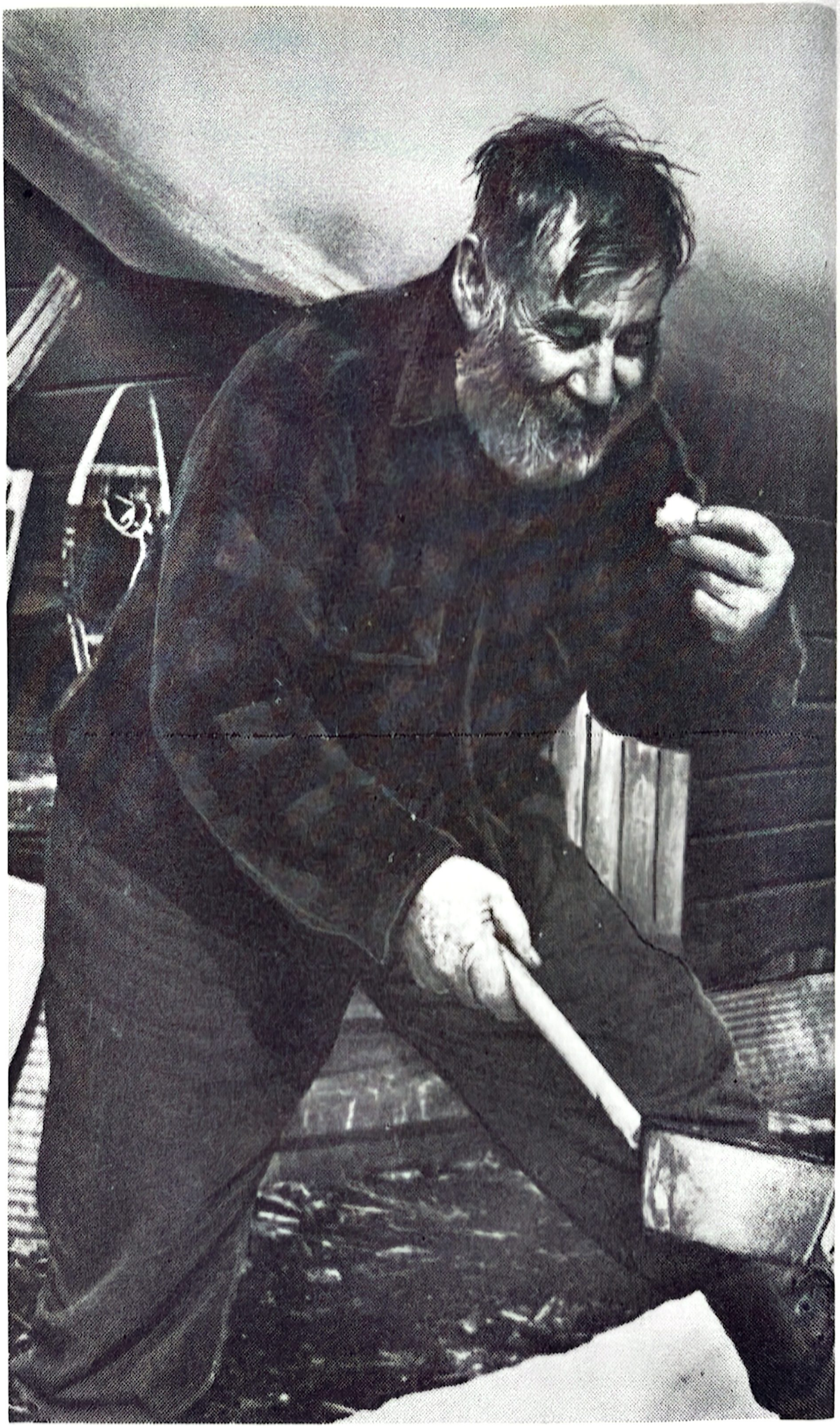
Before we did any cutting, we talked it over with some of the old-timers who work at Frontier Town. Lester Decker recalled that from about the middle of January on the men would be down to the lake checking the thickness of the ice. This was the time of the year the men looked forward to, a time to get together and work with each other the same as at a barn raising. The saws would be sharpened, the horses shod, and the men would swap stories of past winters. And of course, Big Jim Gero of Blue Ridge would again be asked if he was going to accept a dare to jump in the lake when the last block of ice was cut, as he had done for many years, and he would quickly reply, "By gar—to be sure . . ."

When the ice was "ripe"—(about 18 inches thick), the snow would be cleared away and the ice marked for the cutting. The ice cleats would be hammered into the horses' shoes to keep them from slipping as they pulled the "ice-plow" to make the initial cuts in the ice. About four pulls through the same cut were necessary to cut down to the full 10 inches of the blade. All parallel cuts were made first, then the cross-cuts. Good square cuts were easy to make by the experienced horses and driver. Ice plows could be made to cut deeper, but generally 8 inches of ice was left to be cut by hand so there would be no danger of the horses breaking through.

When the ice was all plowed, the first couple of runs were sawed through with the hand-saws. Thereafter, the blocks could be broken loose with the long bar chisels. The men worked in teams at jobs they were best suited for; those who could swim, if they had to, pulled the 100 pound blocks of ice out of the water. The husky ones loaded the ice onto the sleds and the older men generally had the job of driving the teams. The ice would be stacked in the icehouse with about two feet of sawdust all around the outside to keep down the melting during the hot summer.

At noontime, the women would have a hot and hearty meal awaiting. It was a happy time of eating good food and swapping stories of "the good old days." Chet Stowell remembers the rigorous winter of 1917. It was an "open" winter—no snow, and the ice froze to over three feet deep, making the job doubly difficult in cutting the ice, and loading it on to higher wagons since they could not use sleds on the bare ground. Later that day, when the last block of ice was stored away, men, women and children would gather down at the lake to see Big John, with a yell and a splash, add the final touch to the winter's harvest.

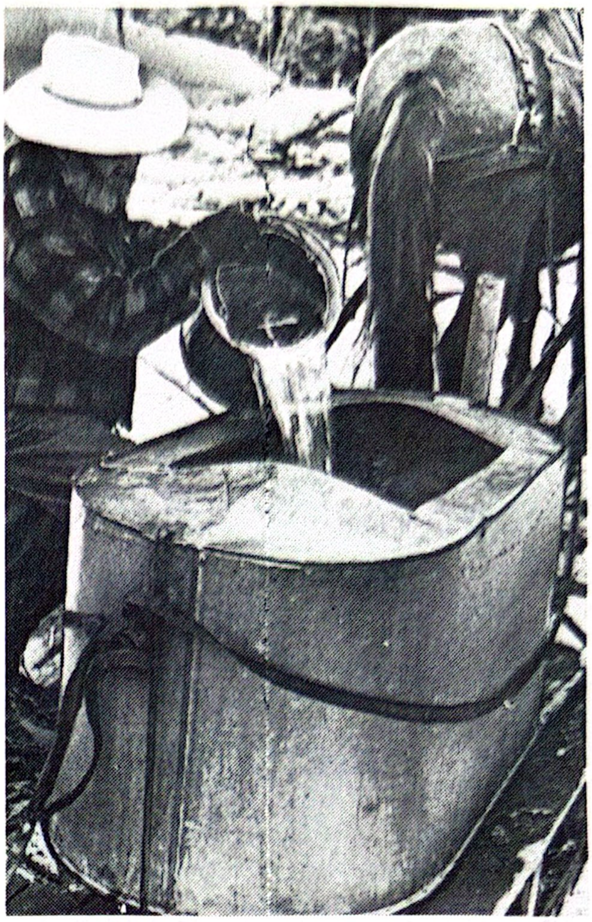
And that's how we harvested the ice for the Frontier Town Ice-House . . . but no one offered to celebrate by jumping into the frigid water. Ah, the good old days when people knew how to express their enjoyment in such a simple exuberant way. But would we really like to return to those days? Well, maybe for a day or so . . . A visit to the Americana Frontier Town might help to fill that longing where one can experience first hand how it really was a couple of hundred years ago. Ride an ox-cart, a stagecoach, a steam train . . . visit the Iroquois Village, a pioneer log town . . . see all the crafts men at work . . . cross the covered bridge to the old sawmill, the water-powered grist mill and, "shades of



THE SWEETEST PART OF THE YEAR IS MAPLE SUGARING TIME

The snow is melting, streams start to gurgle once more and the trickle of maple sap is heard again in the land. This combination of events has sent stage driver Weasel Eye Willie Bryan out into the woods. Its sugaring time in Frontier Town's sugar bush.

Stage Driver Weasel Eye Willie Bruan collects maple sap from Frontier Town's sugar bush. Maple syrup is expensive because it takes 35 gallons of sap to produce one gallon of syrup.



The sap goes into the vat. A sled is the best way of traveling over mud and snow on the rough trails.

Willie delivers the sap to the sugaring house via horse-drawn vat. Most of our visitors are surprised to learn that New York State produces more maple syrup than does the State of Vermont

Fuel goes to the sugaring house where steam marks syrup in the making.

Frederic Tudor," the Ice-House. Visitors upon walking into the cool dimness of the Ice-House will invariably exclaim, "Now *this* is something, kids. Ice that was cut last winter and it still hasn's melted yet! I always wondered how they cooled their drinks back in those days."

## ADIRONDACK ICE FISHING

Another winter activity which many of my Adirondack neighbors enjoy is ice fishing. Once the ice has frozen to a depth of 18 inches or so, it is a common sight to see hundreds of ice shanties dotting Lake Champlain, Schroon Lake, and all the other lakes in the area. Cars are parked alongside the shanties while the fishermen sit inside next to a comfortable stove, listening to the radio and fishing through a hole in the ice for yellow perch or smelts. Smelts are small fish, sometimes called ice fish and they are delicious.

## MAPLE SYRUP PRODUCTION

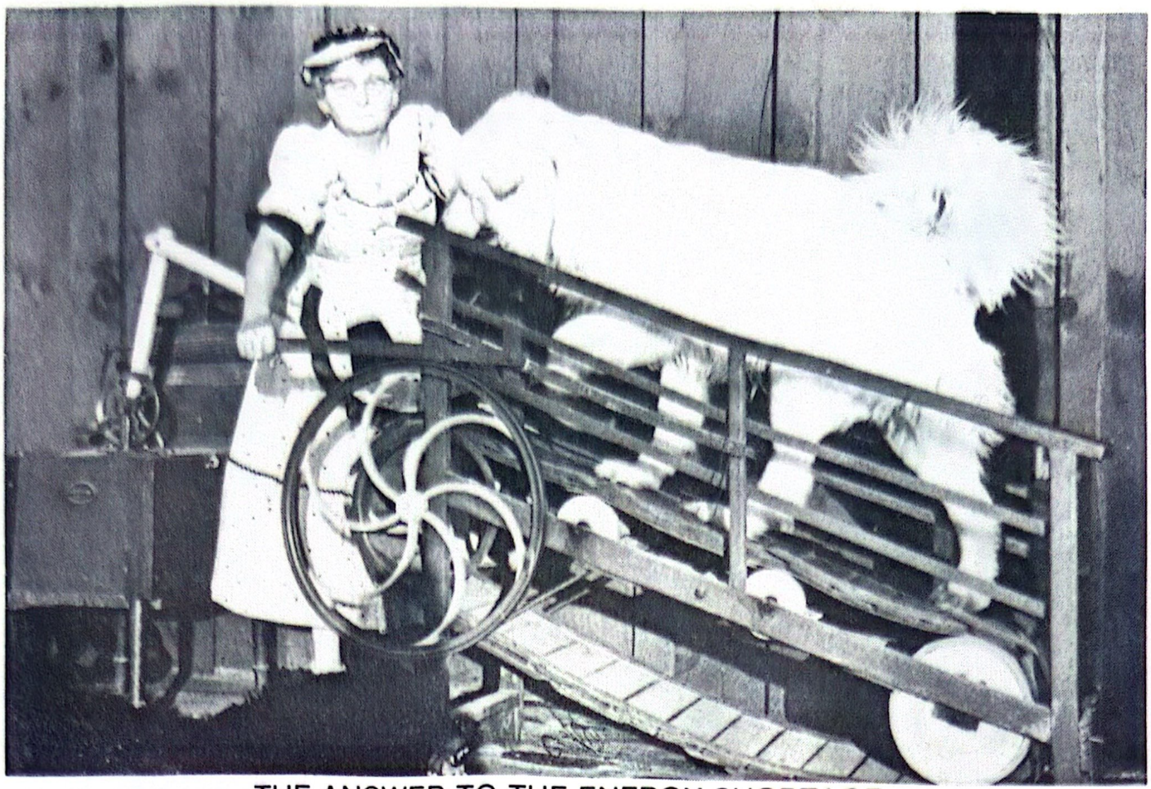
With the coming of spring, my Adirondack neighbors who have hard maples on their land, are found tapping the trees for maple sap which they boil down into maple syrup. Early American settlers learned how to make maple syrup from the Indians. I could not understand how the Indians could boil down the sap since they had only wooden containers which would burn up over a fire. I did some research on this and found out that the Indians boiled down their sap by dropping hot stones into the wooden containers. If you are wondering why genuine maple syrup costs so much, it is because it takes 35 gallons of maple sap to produce one gallon of maple syrup. Many of our visitors are surprised to learn that New York State produces more maple syrup than Vermont.

## FIGHTING FOR FUN

Jim Peshette and all the old timers agreed that fighting was one of the favorite past times. My neighbor Arthur Grenough who is still alive at this writing tells how he and his friends after working all day on the farm, after supper would hike twenty miles to Port Henry over on Lake Champlain, go into a bar, pick a fight, walk back home and get up the next day for another hard day's work on the farm. I sure found myself in the heart of the Adirondacks in the middle of a hardy independent bunch of people. And I mean independent. They never were impressed by a steady job. Even though most of them had no money in the bank, if something on the job displeased them, they would quit at the drop of a hat.

## FRONTIERSMAN JIM LIBERTY

That winter when Jim Liberty, Jim Matherly and I were working on our apartment and office building, I also spent a lot of time looking for all kinds of equipment with which to furnish our log buildings. Jim Liberty was a great help in this. For example, he told me not many years before I came to North Hudson, treadmills were in common use. He pointed out that before the turn of the century, manufacturers were turning out hand powered wooden washing machines and I managed to locate one of these which we now have on display. But, Jim told me, that after a while people didn't want to rock their washing machines by hand, they wanted automatic washers. And they got them. Even before the



THE ANSWER TO THE ENERGY SHORTAGE
Prince, our Great Pyrenees, shows that he too can run the washing machine but most of the time the power is supplied by our solemn faced goat, Soapsuds. The operator is Lena Stillwell whose trouble with elephants we related above. My neighbors told me that not too many years before Frontier Town started treadmills were in common use. They said that the dogs and goats soon learned that Monday was washday and unless tied up Sunday night were not to be found on Monday.

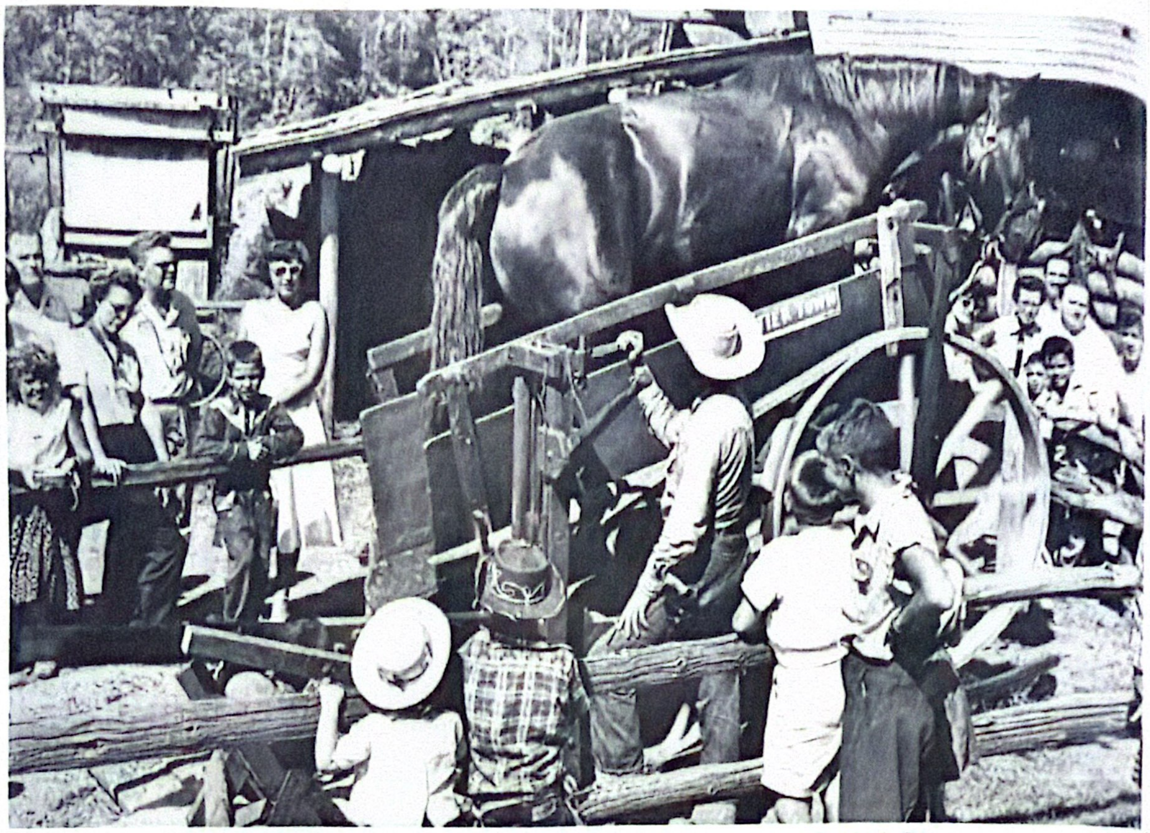
invention of electricity, several manufacturers had turned out washing machines powered by big dogs or goats walking a treadmill. Jim said these machines were in common use when he was a young fellow and he remembered how the people would have to tie their animals up on Sunday night. Otherwise, they would not be around on Monday to do the wash.

He also told me that years ago when he was a boy, men would come around from farm to farm with a horse pulling a treadmill on wheels. They would pull into the dooryard of a farm, take off the wheels, drop the treadmill to the ground, lead the horse up into the treadmill and saw up the winter's supply of firewood.

I found a number of these treadmills in the old barns in the region and for years, Bucksaw, the old horse, has been sawing wood and Soapsuds, our solemn faced goat, has been showing our visitors how we churn butter and do the wash at the same time.

We took Bucksaw and his treadmill to the New York Sports Show some years ago. Ripley came by and saw him in action and did a "Believe It Or Not" on the horse that saws wood.

Jim Liberty was a never-ending source of frontier information for me and he knew horses too. One day that winter, while having my Chevy serviced in Schroon Lake, the mechanic, whose name was John Palmer, said to me, "Say, you are going to need stagecoach horses and I've got a team I'm not using and I'll sell them to you with the harnesses for $150." I said, "I'll go home and get my adviser, Jim Liberty, and we'll meet you



A BIGGER ANSWER TO THE ENERGY SHORTAGE

Our horse Bucksaw saws wood. I found this treadmill in an old barn in North Creek. In 1955 we took it to the sports show in Madison Square Garden where Ripley saw it and made it the subject of a "Believe it or Not" cartoon. These treadmills also supplied power for threshing machines and other old types of farm equipment which we have on display in our farmers' museum.

at your barn in about an hour." He was there when we arrived. Jim looked the horses over very carefully and inspected their teeth, checked the harnesses and said that this was a good buy. I hired my neighbor, Ross Bessey, with his flatbed truck to go down to Palmer's the next day and pick up the team and the harness. Now this was in the dead of winter, with snow laying about four feet deep, but Bessey found a bank to back up to and proceeded to load those horses while I stood off at a respectable distance. You see, those horses hadn't been used for a while and were pretty lively and hard to handle. But Bessey knew how to control them. He had some of his own which he used in the woods for he, too, was a logger. Before long he had them safely aboard the truck and was heading up the road. I followed along in the Chevy. When we arrived at our place, since there was no bank to unload on to, Bessey simply backed the end of his truck into the deep snow, climbed up on the truck, unhitched one of the horses, walked to the back end of the truck and jumped off with the horse right into the snow. Somehow Ross and the horse foundered their way to the rear door and into the cow-shed. He repeated the performance with the second horse and it wasn't long before both horses were safely tied up in the barn. And so, for the rest of the winter, I had two horses to keep me company in that building in which I was living. These two horses were the beginning of our horse herd which presently numbers 100 head. For the rest of the winter, we had to feed, water and exercise those horses every day and I enjoyed it very much. When I wasn't there to take care of those chores, they were handled by either Jim Liberty or Jim Matherly.

Jim Liberty also helped me find old organs for the church, looms, spinning wheel and much of the other equipment and furnishings of our log buildings, so that when we opened the next summer, our buildings were well furnished.

Jim became a close personal friend and worked for me about 15 years until his death. I have told you how Jim was the first man I hired and how he immediately located four more lumberjacks for me. About a day or two after we hired those lumberjacks, one of them said to me, "Don't expect to keep Jim Liberty too long. He has one luxury in life and that is quitting his job. If things don't go exactly the way he wants, he'll leave at the drop of a hat." I had heard the same from others, but I guess I set a new record; in all those years, Jim quit me only twice. The first time was in the middle of that 1951-1952 winter when we were working on the office and apartment. We had cleared away the snow and dug a ten by ten by eight foot deep hole for a cesspool. I had had a load of cedar logs delivered and had hired another man just to log up that cesspool. He had assured me that he was an expert at this but after fooling around down there for about an hour or two, he came upstairs to where we were working and reported that he was stuck. This was about 2:30 P.M. and it looked like were were in for more snow. Now I did not know that Jim heartily disliked this young man. I asked Jim to give him a hand. When Jim went down the stairs, I assumed my cesspool troubles were over. That is, until I heard Jim's car start and saw him head down the road. The next day I met him walking down Main Street in Schroon Lake, and the conversation went like this: "Hi, Jim, how are things going?" "Okay." "How are Hazel and the rest of the family?" "Just fine." "But that was some snowstorm we had last night, wasn't it?" "Sure was." "By the way, are you working?" "Nope." "We could use another man." "Okay, I'll be up in the morning." And he was.

The other occasion of Jim quitting occurred about two years later. Jim and Ed Ovensen were putting a log frame around one of the big highway signs. They were working on a scaffold about 15 feet off the ground. They had already spiked one end of the log in place and Ed was struggling by might and main to hold the big log in position for Jim to fasten it with a 16 inch spike. As might be expected, Ed was in no position to carefully choose his words, but under the stress of the moment, gave orders to Jim a bit too sharply. Said Jim, "I guess it's time for me to leave." And down the ladder he went with his tools, leaving Ed speechless and trying not to drop that heavy log. Had he done so, it would have smashed the scaffold and sent Ed flying. Fortunately, I came along about ten minutes later and rescued Ed from a bad situation. Two days later, I again met Jim on Main Street of Schroon Lake. "Hi, Jim, how are you?" "Okay." "How are Hazel and the rest of the family." "They're just fine." "Quite a bit warmer today, isn't it?" "Sure is." "By the way, are you working?" "Nope." "We've got plenty of work and can use you." "Okay, I'll be up in the morning." And he was, never to leave again.

Jim was of the old school. If I should be called away from the job, and had failed to provide him enough material or information, when he had gone as far as he could, he would sign out and go home. He always said he didn't want to be paid for any time he did not work.

Jim had quite a sense of humor though. He never tired of telling stories about the French lumberjacks who had worked in the lumber camps with him. For example, he told me about Jarvis Martinique the French blacksmith in one of the lumber camps Jim had worked in. One day when Jarvis' forge set the blacksmith shop on fire Jarvis devoted his efforts to saving the anvil while a shop full of horses, harnesses and other equipment, which he could have rescued, all burned up.

He told me that many of the Frenchmen who came down to work in the Adirondack lumber woods came from places in Canada that apparently had no names. They would say that they came from "twenty five cents past Three Rivers" referring to the railroad fare.

Many of these Frenchmen would work until they had earned enough to go back to Canada and buy a farm. Others would work all season, come out of the woods and within a week's time drink up every cent they had earned at one of the mountain hotels.

Jim also told me that the quantity and quality of the food in a lumber camp was more important to a lumberjack than the amount of wages he received. (One dollar for a twelve hour day.) A camp which was known to have a good cook who served unlimited amounts of good johnny cake, meat and vegetables and home made bread three times a day had no trouble getting help. A camp which served poor food would suddenly lose its entire crew.

Incidentally Jim Liberty, Frank Palmer and all my Adirondack neighbors had had to learn French to communicate with the French lumberjacks with whom they came in contact in the lumber camps. In fact, French names predominate in our region today as a glance at our Frontier Town payroll will show.

Some of these Frenchmen remained to become citizens and live in the Adirondacks. Jim tells the story of the Frenchmen who went to Elizabeth Town for his naturalization papers. When the judge asked "What is the population of North Hudson?" he replied, "Mostly pine and balsam but there is some cedar there too." "Tell me about your forefathers?" "I ain't got four fathers I got one father." "Where were you born?" "In Canada." "Which part?" "All of me." "Do you promise to support the Constitution of the United States?" "Give me my hat and let me get out of here. I already got one wife, ten children, two dogs, three cats, and one canary bird. That's enough for any man to support."

Jim Liberty was a wonderful employee and a loyal and true friend. I will always appreciate his enormous help in making Frontier Town a reality.

## WEASEL EYE WILLIE BRYAN

That first winter, Jack Ward, who was supervisor of North Hudson, told me about a man who lived in Pepper Hollow at the north end of town who years ago had driven stagecoaches in the Adirondacks. So one evening, shortly thereafter, I went to Pepper Hollow to visit Willie and his wife, Lil. I found them living in an old farmhouse about a mile off the main highway on the bank of a lovely mountain stream. They had a large kitchen with a big old fashioned iron woodburning stove that kept that kitchen warm and cozy. There was a pile of firewood in the woodbox next to the stove, a pile of wood being preheated in the stove's oven, and a blazing wood fire in the stove.

Willie and Lil received me very cordially and Willie quickly agreed to drive a stagecoach for me when Frontier Town opened the next summer. During all the years he was at Frontier Town he was known as "Weasel Eye Willie Bryan." But I hadn't been there very long before Willie said, "I don't know what to do about my woman. She don't like nothing modern. Last week I put this faucet up over the stove, but every morning before I leave the house, she makes me fill up every spare pot and pan and turn the electric pump off. If she runs out of water, she takes a pail and fetches it from the brook like she has always done before." Said Lil, "Well, I ain't going to have no pump blow up in my house like I heard about." Toilet facilities consisted of an outhouse in the back yard. I also learned that Willie Bryan could write a check for $35,000, yet he and his wife, (their children were grown) were perfectly content to live in this crude fashion, the only way of life they had ever known.

Said Bryan, "When I picked up a gas stove in town about three weeks ago and brought it home and was unloading it, she told me I got stuck on the deal because the stove had no smokepipe." Said Lil, "How could I know that gas stoves had no stovepipe. I never seen one before." I then commented, "I see you have electricity. How do you like that?" She replied, "I don't care nothing about it. I like my old kerosene lamps. Except I do like my frigerator. It was getting to be quite a chore hanging my meat down in the well."

## DOING ERRANDS ON THE OLD STAGE LINE FROM WESTPORT TO LAKE PLACID

I spent many an evening in the cozy kitchen that winter munching on Lil's homemade bread, spread thick with home-churned butter and listening to Willie's experiences on the old stage line and in the lumber woods. I quickly perceived that Willie's sparkling personality and quick Irish wit, would make him a terrific TV guest and over the next few years, got him on Fred Allen's Show, Herb Shriner's Show, the Johnny Carson ABC Show, Who Do You Trust and many other radio and TV shows.

Willie's appearance on the Fred Allen Show was his first visit to New York City. When Fred asked him what he thought of New York, Willie replied emphatically, "T'aint necessary." After the hilarity subsided, Fred asked him to explain. Said Willie, "Well, I'll tell you, Fred, it's like a great big ant hill. People is running around on top of the ground and underneath the ground. None of them seem to know where they are going. I wouldn't trade one square foot of Pepper Hollow for the whole of Times Square with Wall Street thrown into the bargin."

Fred asked him what he did in the winter time, Willie said, "I hunt and fish and bottom chairs." Allen, "bottom chairs?" "Yes." Said Willie. "I get a roaring fire going in my stove, pick up one of them Western books drop my bottom in the chair and let the rest of the world go by."

Weasel Eye Willie Bryan poses on the drivers seat of our 100 year old Concord coach, the same kind he drove on Adirondack stage lines year ago. Posing with Willie are some of our other Frontier Town performers.

When Allen asked whether he looked at TV he replied, "Look Fred I live in Pepper Hollow and I don't have no television because my neighbors that has tried it find out that by the time them pictures come flying over the mountains and busting through the trees they are so broke up you can' make nothing of it."

Normally, people who appear on shows of this type are carefully rehearsed. However, when they tried that with Willie he got nervous and finally he said, "Look, why don't you just turn me loose with Fred and this will go a lot better." They did just that and Willie was completely relaxed and terrific.

Johnny Carson had such a good time with Willie that he held him over for a second day.

We also had Willie sawing wood with Old Bucksaw in our treadmill in the Sports Show in New York City where Willie got used to signing a lot of autographs. One day I had him in Radio City taping a network radio program with Henry Morgan who had a great time with Willie. As we were leaving the studio, Willie suddenly came to a halt and muttered to himself, "Autograph." He turned around, walked back to the table where Henry Morgan was still sitting and said to him, "Henry, I forgot to give you my autograph." With that, he signed a piece of blank paper and handed it to Morgan. Henry, with that knowing smile of his, accepted Willie's autograph with profuse thanks.

Willie used to say, "My wife can make money go a long way. She sends some to Sears Roebuck in Philadelphia, some to Montgomery Ward in Chicago and some she sends even further than that."

Lil was a homebody, scared to death to ride in Willie's car. In fact up to not too many years before she died she would harness the horse and drive around in their buggy even as far as Elizabethtown 25 miles away. She often said to me about various neighbors, "Now Art she is a lovely lady but ain't it too bad that she ain't handy around the barn?"

Willie and Lil had a team of horses that they no longer needed or used. One day Willie decided to sell them so he arranged for a buyer to come and look them over. When the buyer showed up and Lil spotted him she said, "Willie are you going to sell the girls?", "yes", said Willie, "we don't need them anymore what's the use of feeding them" and he put his coat on and walked out to the buyer. A short time later when he came in the house to sign the papers he noticed tears in Lil's eyes. By this time he wasn't feeling too happy about it himself. Suddenly he turned to the man and said, "Mr. I'm sorry but you ain't got money enough to buy them horses. We've decided to keep them" and they kept those big work horses as pets for five years more until the horses died.

Willie always complained that in these days of the automobile, people are too busy to enjoy each other's company. He longed for the old stage line days when he did errands for all the folks who lived along his route and folks frequently got together for what he called "kitchen hops," dances and get togethers held right in someone's big kitchen with lots of good country cooking.

Willie had some fantastic stories and he claimed they were true. For example, he told how Ensign Pond was so shallow that it froze right to the bottom with all the fish frozen right into the ice. He said he had cut ice out of that pond with fish frozen into the blocks of ice that began to swim around when he thawed the ice out in a tub of water.

He also told of fishing through the ice on Schroon Lake in weather so cold that upon being pulled out of the water, the fish froze solid immediately. Yet when he brought them home and put them into a tub of water, they "came back to life and began to swim around."

He also told me that on river drives the men slept along the river bank in a long lean-to under a great big felt blanket made from the wide belt used in the paper mills for drying the paper, 15 or 20 men in a row, with all their clothes on. Said Willie, "Art one night the fellow next to me was real restless, snoring and moving about. He woke me up about a dozen times shifting around. I couldn't figure out what was the matter until morning came and what do you suppose. A big bear had snuggled down between me and the fellow next to me and that bear had caused all the commotion."

Willie was a colorful character at Frontier Town and always gave the stagecoach passengers lots of fun as he made up wild stories of how he had captured Hooknose Joe or Pegleg Pete, whose grave markers can be seen from the stagecoach as it passes Boot Hill. He always brought his passengers back into town laughing.

He was a loyal employee and a true friend. I miss him and his wife very much.

### JIM PESHETTE

I first learned about Jim Peshette from Jim Liberty when we discovered that some of the wheels on our first three stagecoaches had loose iron rims. Said Jim Liberty, "Jim Peshette is the only person who can take care of that and he knows exactly how to do it."

I believe Jim Peshette and his blacksmith shop must have been the one Longfellow had in mind when he wrote his famous poem about the village blacksmith. His shop was very picturesque. It was located on a beautiful trout stream where Jim could wet a line whenever business was slow.

Jim told me that tightening loose iron tires in horse and buggy days kept the average blacksmith just about as busy as horseshoeing.

Perhaps you would like to know how it is done. First, Peshette removed the four bolts that held the loose rim to the wooden rim of the wheel. This permitted the loose iron tire to be slipped off the wheel. Next, Jim cut about one inch out of the iron tire. Then he took the rim to his forge and heated the ends where the piece had been cut out. He then took the tire and laid the heated ends on his anvil and welded them together by pounding them on his anvil. Next, he heated the entire rim in his forge. The heat caused the rim to expand so that it easily slipped over the wheel. Jim then poured cold water on the iron rim. This caused it to contract and tighten around the wheel. He then replaced the four rim bolts and the job was finished.

Peshette and I became fast friends. I always enjoyed visiting with him and listening to his stories about the early days in North Hudson where he had lived and of the country dances at John Carson's hotel which used to stand about one mile up the road from Frontier Town before it burned down some years ago. Jim Peshette and his wife loved to attend those dances. He described how Carson kept the rambunctious lumberjacks, who had been drinking too much, in line by sneaking up behind them and knocking them out with an ax handle, then dragging them down three flights of stairs with their heads bouncing on each step and dumping them out into the cold until they came to and promised to behave. Peshette told how in the old days when there was neither a dentist nor doctor in town, Carson pulled teeth with an ordinary pair of pliers and sewed up big cuts with an ordinary needle and black thread. All this with no anesthetic, or antiseptic, of course.

Jim Peshette had an invalid wife and I was constantly amazed at the loving, gentle care this tough blacksmith showered upon her. Jim loved his flower garden. He specialized in Easter lilies. He insisted that anyone who came to his shop must come across the road and see his flowers. To see those tough, calloused hands lovingly caressing his flowers to me was a study in contrasts.

In 1919, Jim also organized a company to build a hydroelectric power plant on Frank Palmer's property.

When Jim grew too old to operate his shop, I bought his forge and equipment and put it on display in our blacksmith shop at Frontier Town.

## OLIVE ANSON

Olive Anson was another interesting Adirondacker with whom I became acquainted during that first winter of 1951-1952. Olive was and still is our milk lady. She and her brother run a small milk plant and Olive does the delivering, every day, and I mean every day, 365 days of the year, including Christmas, Easter and all the other days. Olive is an accommodating lady and without charge, carries messages and packages between her customers which includes everyone in North Hudson. She is getting old now and I wonder how much longer she can keep up this 365 days a year grind. I have never known Olive to take a day off in the more than 26 years I have been in North Hudson.

Anson's
DAIRY
PRODUCTS

Olive Anson has delivered our milk 365 days a year for over quarter of a century. I have never known her to miss a day. Here she is outside our office with her friend Festus.

## CLEON HALL AND OUR CONCORD STAGECOACH

While searching for stagecoaches that first winter, I heard that Cleon Hall, the treasurer of the little independent bank in North Creek, a town about 30 miles from Frontier Town, knew where some stagecoaches could be found. So, one Sunday afternoon I went over to see Mr. Hall. He seemed cool and skeptical when I told him about my plans for Frontier Town. However, he told me that when he was a boy, the firm of Wadell and Emerson ran a stageline out of the old railroad terminal at North Creek, using Concord coaches. He also told me that the grandson of Wadell was in the grain business there in North Creek and probably could give me help in locating one of these old coaches.

Now the old Concord coaches are the kind you see in most western movies. They were made by the Abbot Downing Company in Concord, New Hampshire who in 1857 had a plant covering twelve acres. The turned out these coaches like an automobile plant today turns out automobiles. I have seen photographs of long trains of railroad flatcars leaving the Abbot Downing plant loaded with Concord coaches. Concord coaches have no metal springs. Their bodies are hung on huge leather straps called thoroughbraces. And they impart a motion to the vehicle like that of a ship at sea. No vehicle ever made has been able to stand the stress and strain of rough country travel as has the Concord coaches and they saw service on all five continents. We are proud to have one at Frontier Town.

It didn't take me long to get to Mr. Wadell's home. Unfortunately, though he vividly remembered seeing the stageline in operation, he did not know what had happened to the Concord coaches. He told me, however, that he remembered that one of his grandfather's coaches had been held up by an armed robber and he showed me a clipping from the New York Times telling about the holdup. The only stagecoach holdup in the history of New York State. Here it is in the N.Y. Times (1901):

## NEW YORKER DESCRIBES THE AMAZING STAGE ROBBERY

Indian Lake, N.Y. Aug. 16. The thrilling tale of the daring holdup of the Blue Mountain stage of Coon Hill, west of North River, in the Adirondacks, on Wednesday by a masked highwayman, was told today at Indian Lake by Edward Bernstein, son of Benjamin Bernstein, a New York clothing manufacturer. He was one of the passengers who escaped robbery.

By Edward Bernstein:

The Blue Mountain stage left North Creek, the eastern terminus of the Adirondack Railway, about mid-day. There were seven passengers including myself. All were bound for Indian Lake. The stage entered a thick wood soon after it left North Creek. The road was dark and narrow.

The old stage rumbled along, swaying on the rough road until it reached the base of Coon Hill. I should not have known the name of the hill had not William Eldridge, the driver of the six-in-hand team told me. I was on the box with him from North Creek.

The stage slackened up before essaying the steep hill and began the ascent at a very slow pace. As it neared the hill-top, a masked man stepped from behind an oak tree and placed himself in the middle of the road. He was about twenty yards in front of us.

### *The Masked Highwayman*

At first it was impossible to see his face because he had his back toward the sun. But as we advanced another yard or two we noticed that he wore a big slouch hat, a blue flannel shirt with an old red handkerchief around the collar. A heavy beard that came to a point, covered the lower part of the bandit's face and two piercing eyes were visible through holes in the mask. He stood still, menacing us with a rifle.

Driver Eldridge smiled and nudged my elbow. "A tourist! Bet you." He said, laughing outright. But the stranger didn't look it.

"Drop those lines!" ordered the highwayman.

"Drop what lines?" asked Eldridge, bringing his whip down with a snap on the backs of the leaders. "What are you giving us?" he continued, laughing heartily. "Get out of the way or I'll run over you." The masked man didn't move an inch, but raised his gun to his shoulder, "Drop those lines!"

Two shots followed this order. It looked as if the highwayman meant business, for the two leaders of the team reared and dropped to the ground, dead. Those in the coach shrieked loudly and for a moment I thought someone had been shot.

"Drop those lines!" the highwayman commanded for the third time. "Come now! Stand and deliver!"

Eldridge dropped the lines and made a flying leap from the box. I didn't think it safe to stay on the coach either, so I followed the driver.

### *Bullet Whistled By*

I had hardly touched the ground when a third shot passed dangerously near my head. My legs gave way under me and I fell to the ground. I thought I had broken them, but I found later than my ankles were sprained. I crawled far into the woods and hid in thick underbrush.

I had seven thousand dollars about my person and had no intention of handing it over to a robber. I remained in hiding for nearly an hour and then started back for the road. When I reached it, the stage had gone. So I had to begin a six mile journey to Indian Lake on my hands and knees.

## I BUY OUR CONCORD STAGECOACH

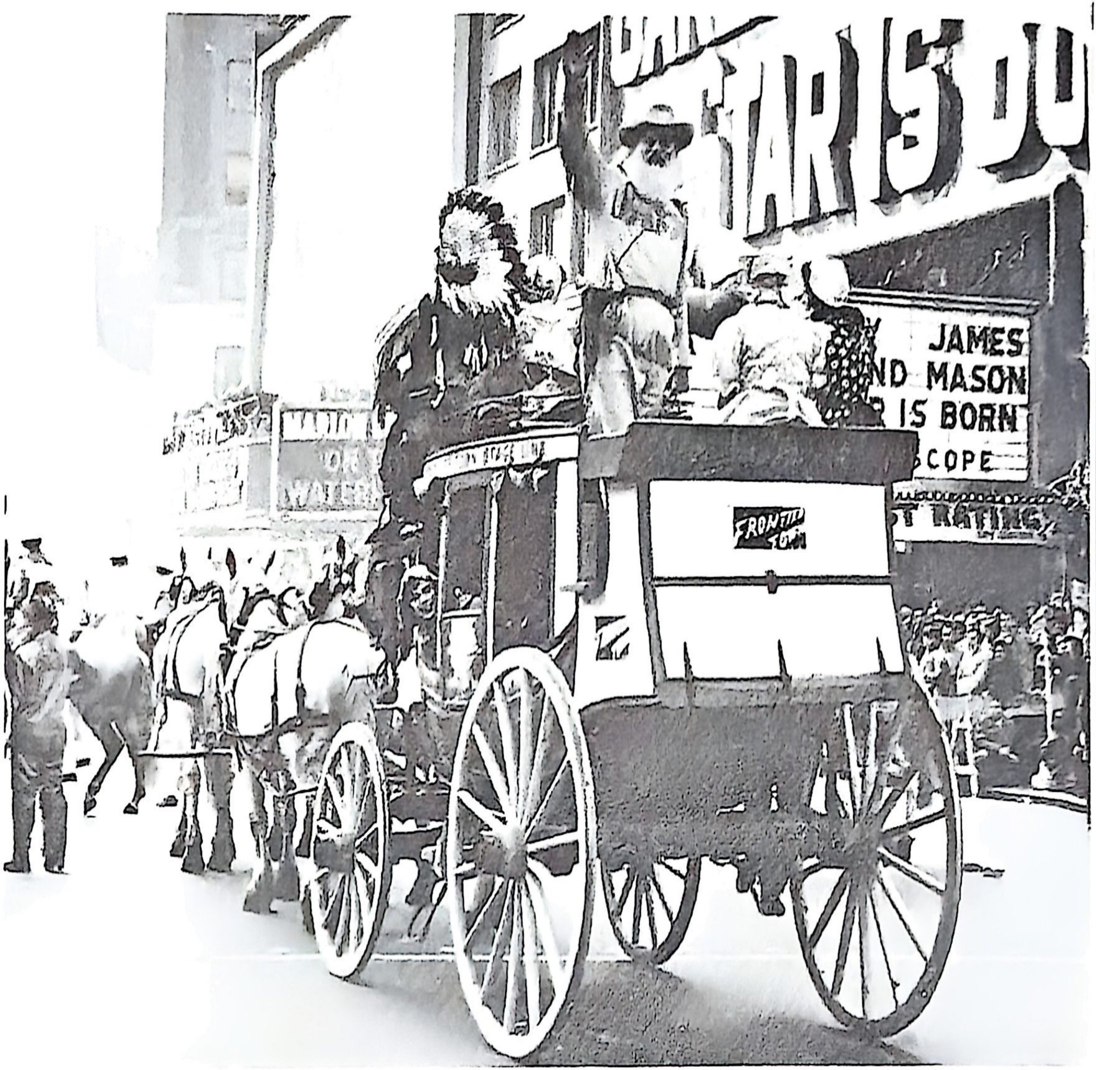
The first winter I learned that a neighbor, Mrs. Smith, a very wealthy lady from Waterbury, Connecticut, had two Concord coaches in her barn. I tried to contact her and buy them but she wouldn't even see me. However, the second year Frontier Town was open, Mrs. Smith died and the two Concords were put up at auction. I was fortunate enough to get the Wadell Emerson coach that was held up in the only stagecoach holdup recorded in New York State.

On the day of the sale, I was on hand, bright and early, hoping that no one else would be interested in those Concord stagecoaches. When the bidding reached the coaches, I discovered I was wrong. A wealthy hog raiser from Secaucus, New Jersey, who collected old vehicles, was interested in these coaches. We were soon bidding against each other. The price on the first one went very high. So I approached him and said, "Look, I want these coaches as badly as you do. Let's compromise. Why jack the price up? I'll let you have the first one if you let me have the second one."

He agreed. So the first one was bought by him. The second one was mine for $1,500 because he didn't bid on it.

A few years later we had that 100-year-old Concord coach in Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade and held up right in front of Macy's Store with the holdup broadcast coast to coast by Arlene Francis over NBC-TV.

After Frontier Town opened, I used to bring the deposits to Cleon Hall's bank. Now his coolness quickly turned to warmth. It seemed that we were pretty good customers. He even kept the bank open after hours if we couldn't get there by normal closing times. One day he called me into his office and said, "I've got to tell you this. Do you remember that Sunday afternoon you came to my home asking about stagecoaches? Well,



Our 100 year old Concord stage coach in Macy's parade passes through Times Square on its way to Macy's store where it was held up with the hold up described coast to coast over NBC TV by Arlene Francis. This stage is the only coach ever held up in the history of New York State. This took place in 1901 near North River, New York. A passenger's eye witness account of the robbery appears in a New York Times article which we have included on page 35.

when you left, my wife said to me, 'Who was that?' and I replied, 'Oh, he's some nut from the city who has bought the Wathsock farm over there in North Hudson and he's building some log cabins on it and he's going to call it Frontier Town and thinks people are going to pay to get in to see it. I think he's crazy.' I want to apologize to you and thank you for using our bank. You are one of our best customers, and we appreciate your business very much."

## GARRY HANSEN

Garry Hansen was a neighbor about 60 years of age when I first came to North Hudson. Garry lived in a log cabin in the woods about 3 miles north of Frontier Town. His father had been in the lumber business and was known as a very hard worker. Somehow none of his father's abition ever rubbed off on Garry. I cannot remember that Garry ever did a day's work although occasionally he managed to get on somebody's payroll including ours. However, he was a very congenial fellow and I liked him.

Garry and his wife built the log cabin they lived in. That is, his wife built it. But he did tell me that he helped her with the rafters.

As I say, I liked Garry and often took him along for company if I had to go to Glens Falls or Albany and I liked to drop into his cabin for a visit once in awhile.

One afternoon I stopped by and found Garry rocking away in his comfortable old rocking chair. His wife had a steady job and was out earning a living for Garry and herself. We made some small talk for a while and then Garry said, "Art I ran into a problem last evening." Said I "Nothing too serious I hope." "Well" said he, "I was sitting here when I happened to look out the window and there was a beautiful buck standing under that tree over there. I grabbed my rifle which I always keep handy and was about to get up and go to the door and get that buck when I suddenly remembered that that door has a very squeeky hinge. If I opened that door that buck would be gone. So I sat here and thought it over. I finally concluded that my wife would rather fix the window than have me miss that buck. So I drew a bead on him through the window and got him the first shot." I checked the window and there was the neat bullet hole and there on the ground outside was as fine a buck as I have ever seen.

Garry was an excellent hunter. He was out hunting one day with Ed's brother Leif Ovensen when they suddenly came upon a big partridge. In a flash, firing his rifle from his hip at a distance of 60 yards Garry blew the head off that partridge with a rifle bullet. A remarkable feat.

## JACK WARD

Jack Ward was supervisor of North Hudson when I bought the Wathsock farm. He was one of the skeptics. Almost every morning Jim Liberty, on the way into work in the morning would meet Jack who would ask, "Well, how's Daniel Boone doing there these days?"

After Frontier Town had proven successful, Jim said to me one day, "I notice that now Jack calls you Mr. Bensen."

After Frontier Town had been open just one season, Jack came to me and said, "I want to apologize. I simply did not believe you could draw tourists to North Hudson, but you sure fooled me and a lot of others. You have wiped out the welfare rolls in this town."

Jack and his wife Mary have proved to be good friends and neighbors and have helped us in every way possible.

## FOREST JONES

Just after I had bought the Wathsock property, I inquired about sign painters and was directed to Forest Jones, a man about 35 years of age, who lived with his wife, Betty, and their three young children in Pottersville, about 20 miles south of Frontier Town. It was obvious that we would need a lot of signs at Frontier Town so after working with Jim Matherly and Jim Liberty, converting the old barn into an office and apartment during the daytime, I spent many evenings that first winter at the Jones' home, laying out signs and discussing plans for Frontier Town.

Forest and Betty were helpful advisers during that critical time. It was they who helped me to decide on the name Frontier Town which would give me a wide scope in showing life on America's various historical frontiers, whereas a name like Daniel Boone Town or Cowboy Town would eliminate the possibility of Frontiers of Aviation, Frontiers of Industry, et cetera. I recall that one evening, as opening day was approaching, we were discussing what form the action should take. I had determined that Frontier Town was not to be a dead museum, but a live action town where visitors could forget their worries (the Russians had just gotten the bomb) and experience life as it was in the good old days, for a little while at least.

Suddenly the format came to me and I said, "We'll have the stagecoach held up on every trip. At about two hour intervals, we will appoint one of our young visitors as special deputy, set him up next to the driver as shotgun guard and instruct him to capture and bring in the stagecoach outlaw. He will clamp him into the pillory and the outlaw will be tried by Judge Roy Bean with all the visitors serving on the jury. He will lose the case and wind up on the ducking stool. He will then be chased out of town. He will round up the rest of his Dalton gang and shoot up the town in revenge." This proved a hit with our visitors and has been a part of our program from the first day until now.

But what's wrong with learning about our country's past and enjoying it? We were using the Sesame Street idea long before it appeared on television. This is the main idea behind Frontier Town. No youngster, or even older person, who has been to Frontier Town, will have to wonder why a blockhouse had that certain design or what a pillory is or how a ducking stool works, or what it felt like to ride a stagecoach in the old days or how frontier craftsman turned out their products or how a sawmill works, or how ice was stored in the days before refrigeration, or how grain was ground by a water powered gristmill, and much more. Frontier Town is not just cowboy bang! bang!, but it is learning American history the fun way.

Well, Forest Jones has been making signs for me from the very first day until now, but he's much more than just a good sign painter, he's an extremely gifted artist. We have used his talents a thousand different ways. He and his wife, Betty, have been eyewitnesses to the development of Frontier Town from the very beginning.

## FRANK PALMER

Frank Palmer was the most interesting of all my Adirondack neighbors. He was 76 years of age when I came to North Hudson. He had served many terms as supervisor and road commissioner of the town. He had worked in the lumber woods for years and he was an expert river driver. (Incidentally, the first river driving in America was done on the Schroon River the very river that flows through Frontier Town.) Frank Palmer always got a kick out of telling me about the time when he and his neighbor, John Welsh, were driving logs right through what is now Frontier Town. They were riding a log apiece and were somehow dumped off in the middle of the river and landed on a big rock in water up to their waists. They were fully clothed and weighted down with axes, cant hooks, heavy clothing and heavy boots. So they talked the situation over. John Welsh couldn't swim so he decided that he could step off the rock into the deep water and hold his breath long enough to walk to the edge of the river where the water was shallow enough to bring his head

Frank saw this mill stone grinding grain when he as a youngster living in Roth's Forge Village located on land which adjoined the Wathsock property and which we bought from Frank Palmer.

above the surface. The weight of his clothing and equipment being enough to keep him on the bottom. Frank said, "I saw him through the water walking along just as calm as could be and he came out all right. Since I could swim I flung my tools toward the shore peeled off all the clothing I could and swam ashore."

For many years he had operated his own water powered saw mill right on the premises he sold to Frontier Town. He had, for over 30 years, operated the small hydroelectric plant on his premises, which since 1920 had supplied electricity to a few homes in North Hudson and to the entire village of Schroon Lake, eight miles to the south. This is the hydroelectric plant that had been built by the company formed by my blacksmith friend Jim Peshette. Frank's legs had been damaged in an accident which had brought them in contact with a high tension line at the hydro station years before I met him. But that didn't stop Frank. For example, one winter afternoon after a heavy snow storm I found him on his knees calmly shoveling his driveway and doing a good job of it. He was over 90 at that time.

Although Frank Palmer had very little formal education, he was one of the most intelligent men I have ever known. He was experienced in building homes and in other types of construction. He was an excellent farmer and Frank was the one who people all over the area came to for advice about treating their sick farm animals and other kinds of farm information.

He was an expert hunter and guide and, in his old age, was still the most accurate marksman in the region. One fine fall afternoon I dropped in for a visit and found Frank sitting on his porch. Said Frank, "Well I just got my buck. He showed up on that hillside about an hour ago and I was tempted to shoot him there until I remembered he was on a runway which would bring him down close to the house. Sure enough in about 15 minutes down he came and I dropped him right over there by the barn. You'll find him in the barn there and he's a good one." So, even in his old age when his damaged legs wouldn't carry him into the woods hunting any longer Frank did his hunting from his front porch.

I've often thought that in the event we survived an atomic attack, Frank Palmer was the man I would want as a neighbor. With his help I believe we could survive living off the land.

Frank owned about 250 acres adjoining the land we bought from Ernest Wathsock. I bought all of Frank's land and gave him a life lease on his house, and, of course, permitted him to use the whole place as if he still owned it. In this way, he could live on the money he received from the sale and still remain in the only home he had ever owned. This arrangement continued to the complete satisfaction of both of us until Frank's death in 1968 at the age of 93.

### FRANK PALMER AND ROTH'S FORGE

A few years after I first met Frank Palmer I was spending a pleasant evening visiting with him and his wife Abby when he made a statement that arrested my attention. He said that he was born in that very house in 1875 when it was part of the tiny village of Roth's Forge which during the Civil War produced wrought iron for the Union, some of which was made into plates for the Monitor which fought the Merrimac in the first battle of iron-clads in Naval history. Roth's Forge was a self contained community which provided housing and the necessities of life for those living and working there. Frank's father was employed there as a collyer or charcoal maker. I immediately embarked on a program of research and archeology which has resulted in our most exciting development at Frontier Town which I tell about in chapter nine.

### HARRY MacDOUGAL

Harry MacDougal was a small whimsical smiling man. Ever since I first met him and until he died at over 80 he was Essex County Chairman of the Republican party and was the county clerk. He was a close friend of Frank Palmer and every other political office holder of all the towns in the area. Like I, he loved delving into the history of the area and in fact he is the prime mover in the founding of the Essex County Historic Society of which I am a charter member. Harry in his youth had worked as a chore boy in lumber camps for some years and he, of course, became very much acquainted with the lumberjacks most of whom, as we have mentioned, were French. He could imitate them to a "T". I never tired of hearing him, in French dialect telling about those lumberjacks. In fact Harry published a column about them in the Ticonderoga Sentinel.

Dorothy Liberty is the daughter-in-law of Jim Liberty the first man I hired on the very day I bought the Old Wathsock farm in 1951. Jim was of great help to me in constructing and furnishing our buildings including this one which is our Frontier Log Home. Dorothy is shelling peas for her delicious pea soup which she serves without charge to our guests. Pea soup was a favorite of French Canadian lumberjacks and is a favorite today of many of their descendants who are our Adirondack neighbors.

All Frenchmen seem to love pea soup. That is why Dorothy Liberty our hostess in our Frontier Town home serves free pea soup to our visitors. Harry's column was entitled Pete Pequoix of Pea Soup Lake and, of course, was done in French dialect. These columns were put up in a booklet which were sold throughout the region including our gift and souvenir shops.

## IN EXPLANATION

"Mr. Harry M. MacDougal, of Elizabethtown, New York, created the character of 'Pete Pequoix of Pea Soup Lake' many years ago. In innumerable personal appearances made at the request of fraternal organizations and other groups in Northern New York State, the woeful tales of Peter have been spun in delightful French dialect to attain unique popularity.

A few years later Mr. MacDougal was persuaded to write of Pete's troubles through letters from that estimable gentleman of Pea Soup Lake. These letters purportedly penned by Pete in his own inimitable slaughter of the English language, have proved Mr. MacDougal's talent for writing amusingly in French dialect as well as speaking it."

The Publishers
Ticonderoga Sentinel
Ticonderoga, New York

Here's a sample of Harry's "Pete Pequoix of Pea Soup Lake" stories.

Pea Soup Lake
Cole day

Boss on Ticentinel
Ticonk,
Dere Jackunbill,

Wal you an me aint see ourself for long tam so I tink I better took my pencil by the han an rote you lettair. Since me an you work on the bush

I make marry wid gurl named Rosie. He aint good for handsome but her hawful good for stout. He break the scale at 417 poune and he chop 2 cord of wood every day and git home in tam to hoe the potato.

Course me I do all the heavy work lak keepin the fire goin when dar is wood on the cambin an den I hav to set an tink up jobs for Rosie so he wont run out of work. It makes me pretty tire but I hang to it jus the same.

Pea Soup Lake is verie beeg village. The popolation is most spruce and balsom, some pine but not very much Mr. Gonyear she keep the store an poss hoffice. I aint lak him very good cus she wont took trust for pay. The only way I can git eny tobac is to borrow some money out of Rosie's sugar bowl when he is on the chop. Mr. Gonyear play mean trick on me to. Wan day when she was in her backroom I tink I try wan of her cracker so I reach down in the barrel an den someting go snap an I am ketch in trap. Aint dat hawful? She can keep her ole cracker I aint want it enyway. She claim I hoe her 2 dollar 19 cent. I tell her she better sold her store an buy school house an go to school some afternoon an learn how to figger.

Joe RaRoe hav the most beeg farm. I guess its beeger dan eny other nowhar dar is. His wafe is hawful hightone. He dont chop atall. We got nase beeg cabin wid 2 room on it. We foune it when we firs come to Pea Soup Lake. Nobuddy was livin in it so we moved in. Its nase cabin wid the back door on the front. The roof leaks quite a lot but not when it dont rain. When we first come we aint got much to keep house wid. Jus a chair, a knafe an spoon an wan link of pipestove. We done pretty good though. Now we got 2 spoon. Wal me Im pretty tire.

Hopin you are the same.

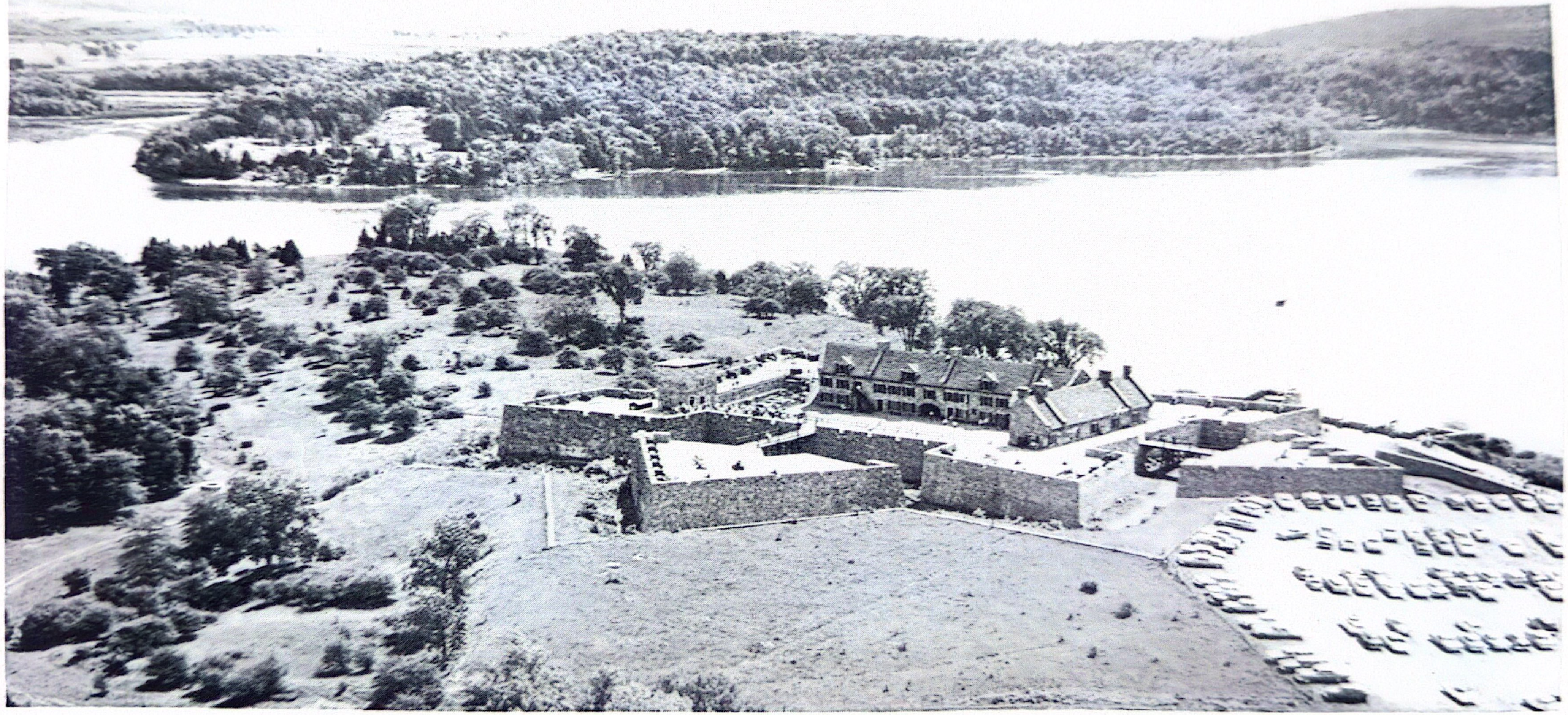
Respectful,
Pete Pequoix

## LITTLE KNOWN SIDE LIGHTS OF AMERICAN HISTORY CONNECTED WITH THE ADIRONDACKS

That first winter I learned some interesting Adirondack history. Some of the most important events in our nation's history took place here. During the French and Indian War the French General Montcolm with only three thousand Frenchmen fought off an attack on Fort Ticonderoga by the British under General Abercrombie with fifteen thousand men. They had come up Lake George from Fort William-Henry in about a thousand boats. The British were defeated and had to retreat back to Fort William-Henry at the south end of Lake George.

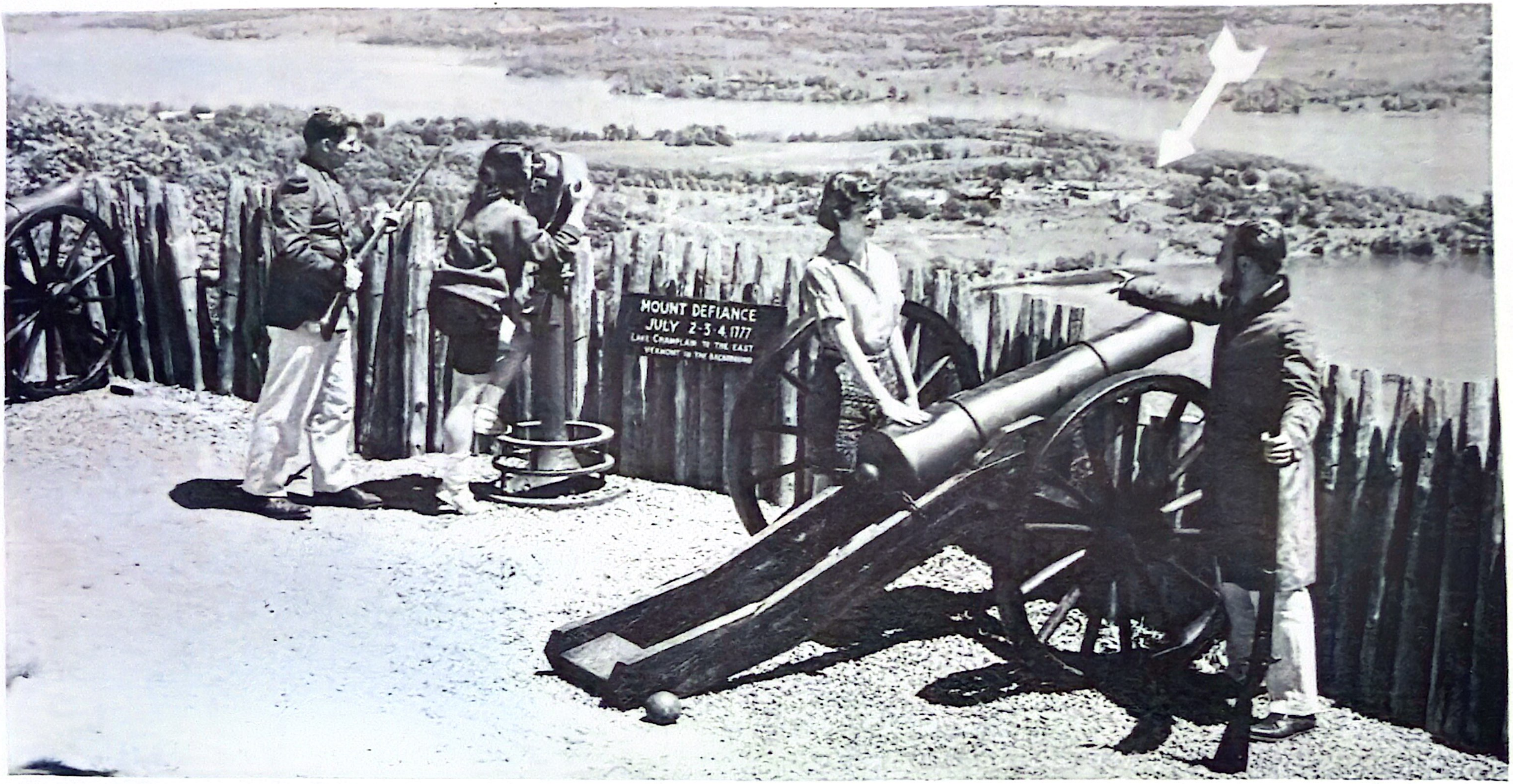
## ETHAN ALLEN, BENEDICT ARNOLD AND THE CAPTURE OF FORT TICONDEROGA

Every American school child learns that early in the American Revolution, Ethan Allen captured Fort Ticonderoga. Very few school children learn that Allen's co-leader was Benedict Arnold who originated this idea. Arnold had gone to George Washington and received permission to attack Fort Ticonderoga. It was granted, but since Allen had the manpower he had to be included as leader too. At the time the Americans captured Fort Ticonderoga another American force captured



FORT TICONDEROGA ON LAKE CHAMPLAIN ABOUT TWENTY MILES EAST OF FRONTIER TOWN

Most American school children know that Ethan Allen captured Fort Ticonderoga. Most Americans are not aware that the originator of the plan to attack Fort Ticonderoga was Benedict Arnold who had to accept Ethan Allen as co-leader because Allen had the man power — his green mountain boys. The Americans had to cross Lake Champlain from Vermont seen here in the background. Today Fort Ticonderoga has been restored by the Pell family. It has an excellent military museum and for the benefit of visitors gives demonstrations of the loading and firing of revolutionary cannon. Cannon from Fort Ticonderoga was taken by ox sled to Boston and used by Washington to drive the British out of that city.


MOUNT DEFIANCE
JULY 2-3-4 1777
LAKE CHAMPLAIN TO THE EAST
VERMONT IN THE BACKGROUND

MOUNT DEFIANCE

While most Americans know that our forces captured Fort Ticonderoga early in the revolution most of us are unaware that not long afterward the British invaders under General Burgoyne, by super human effort, dragged their guns up Mount Defiance, a feat that the Americans thought impossible. When our forces woke up the next morning and found the British guns aiming right into Fort Ticonderoga (arrow) they evacuated the fort without firing a shot. My friend Jim Lonengan has built a paved road up Mount Defiance and visitors like those in the photo can drive right up to the British gun position shown here and to the summit house where souvenirs and refreshments are available.

Skenesborough. This was a Tory village at the south end of Lake Champlain (it is now known as Whitehall). It was the site of a shipyard and a bloomery forge similar to our Roth's Forge which we tell about later.

Mr. Skeen obtained the ore for his bloomery forge from the same ore bed which provided the two thousand tons of ore which the Republic Steel Company gave to us. When Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold and their men ,gathered on the Vermont side of Lake Champlain they were wondering how to get across the lake to attack the fort. Two young boys overheard them and swam across the lake to where they knew Skeen's ore barge was anchored. It was on a trip to pick up a new supply of ore. The boys persuaded the crew to go over to the other side of the lake where, they said, there was gooding hunting. So these boys piloted that ore barge right into the hands of Ethan Allen and Benedict Arnold who used it to cross the lake and capture the fort.

## MOUNT DEFIANCE

While most Americans know about the capture of Fort Ticonderoga very few know that when the British under General Burgoyne came down from Canada and arrived at Fort Ticonderoga, by super human effort they dragged some big guns up Mt. Defiance. The Americans had thought this was impossible. When they awoke the next morning and found those guns looking right down their throats the Americans evacuated the fort without firing a shot.

My friend Jim Lonergan of Ticonderoga has built a road up Mount Defiance and today visitors can drive right up to the gun emplacements and see them pointing right down into Fort Ticonderoga.

## JOHN BROWN

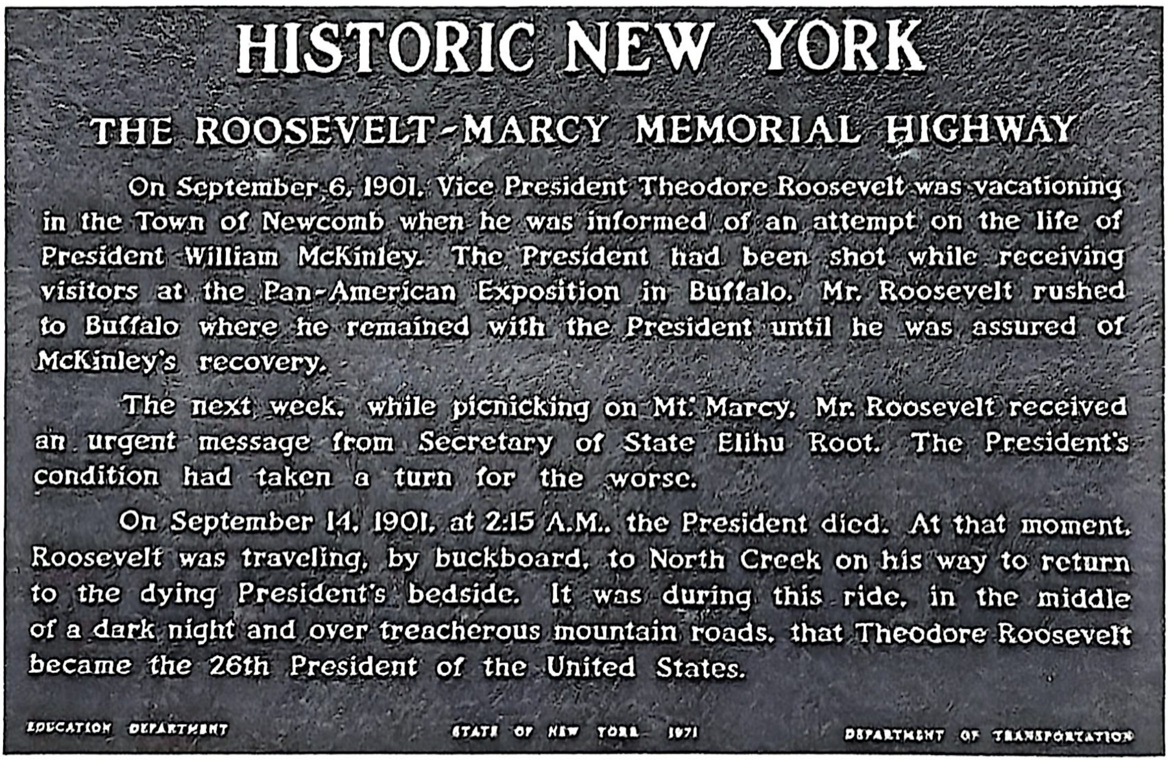
The famous abolitionist had a refuge for escaped slaves northwest of Frontier Town at North Elba. In fact, his underground railroad ran right up through the present location of Frontier Town. John Brown's experiment at North Elba was a failure but after he was hanged at Harpers Ferry, Virginia, his body was brought to his farm at North Elba for burial. Every year memorial services are held by black people at the grave site of John Brown.

## TEDDY ROOSEVELT

Most Americans know that when President McKinley was shot Teddy Roosevelt became president. However, very few Americans know that at the time of the assassination Roosevelt was here in the Adirondacks hunting on Mt. Marcy. I was told by a neighbor, Pete McKenzie, that his uncle Ira Proctor was the person who carried the message to Teddy Roosevelt informing him that McKinley had been shot. I went to see Ira Proctor who was living in a nursing home in Lake George. He verified the story and said "A horse and buggy took Teddy Roosevelt from the foot of Marcy to Aiden Lair, about half way to North Creek." There, Mike Cronin, who ran a country hotel at Aiden Lair, was waiting with fresh horses. He rushed Teddy Roosevelt to North Creek where a special train was waiting to take him to Washington. What Roosevelt did not know as he went tearing down the road was that President McKinley had already died and he was, in fact, the president. Today, there is a monu-

JOHN BROWN
1800 - 1859

JOHN BROWN'S GRAVE
I find that most Americans are unaware that John Brown had a farm and a refuge for escaped slaves at North Elba near Lake Placid about forty miles northwest of Frontier Town. After he was hanged at Harper's Ferry his body was brought back and buried on his farm at North Elba.



## HISTORIC NEW YORK

### THE ROOSEVELT-MARCY MEMORIAL HIGHWAY

On September 6, 1901, Vice President Theodore Roosevelt was vacationing in the Town of Newcomb when he was informed of an attempt on the life of President William McKinley. The President had been shot while receiving visitors at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo. Mr. Roosevelt rushed to Buffalo where he remained with the President until he was assured of McKinley's recovery.

The next week, while picnicking on Mt. Marcy, Mr. Roosevelt received an urgent message from Secretary of State Elihu Root. The President's condition had taken a turn for the worse.

On September 14, 1901, at 2:15 A.M., the President died. At that moment, Roosevelt was traveling, by buckboard, to North Creek on his way to return to the dying President's bedside. It was during this ride, in the middle of a dark night and over treacherous mountain roads, that Theodore Roosevelt became the 26th President of the United States.

EDUCATION DEPARTMENT STATE OF NEW YORK 1971 DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORTATION

This is the highway monument on the road between Newcomb and North Creek, New York about twenty five miles west of Frontier Town.

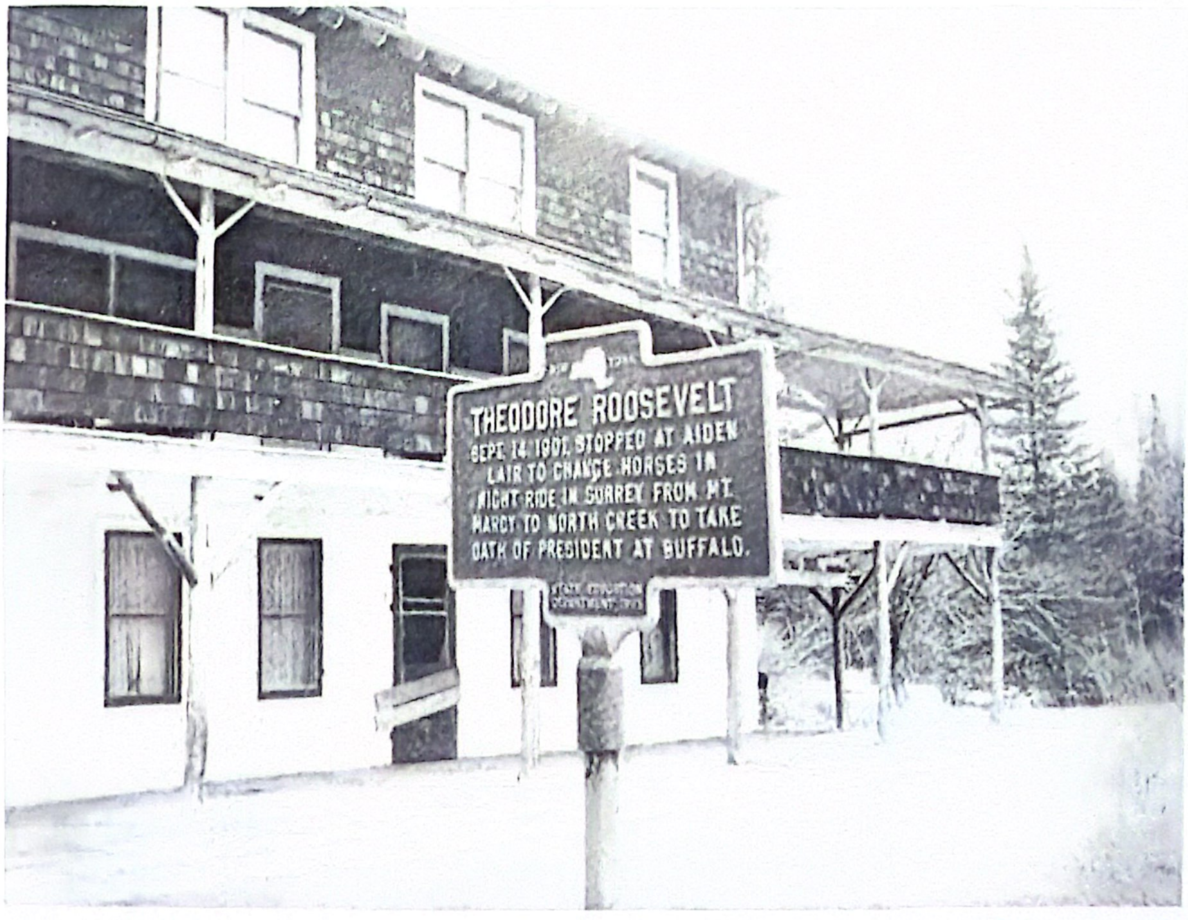
ment alongside that road, now known as the Roosevelt-Marcy Memorial Highway. It tells that at that spot, upon the death of McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt became president of the United States.

Old timers in the area knew Mike Cronin. They told me he was a likeable Irishman who was a practical joker. He always kept one horseshoe under the bar at his hotel in Aiden Lair that "came off the right hind foot of the nigh horse of the team that took Teddy Roosevelt to his train."

Mike's Aiden Lair Hotel was known far and wide for its excellent food and its plain but comfortable accommodations. It was the most popular country hotel in that part of the Adirondacks. It was especially popular with hunters who came to Aiden Lair from New York City and other distant parts of the eastern United States.

Roosevelt was informed of McKinley's death at the railroad station. He thanked Mike Cronin for his services and invited him to be his guest at the inauguration.

The old timers told me that Mike took him up on that invitation. On inauguration day he arrived in Washington and managed to make his way through the crowd. He had to fight furiously to get near the platform. Of course, he had no written invitation so he had to make a big racket to attract Roosevelt's attention. The President finally noticed him ordered that he be brought to the platform introduced him to the crowd and gave him a place of honor. It was an experience nobody could ever forget, least of all Mike Cronin.


THEODORE ROOSEVELT
SEPT. 14 1901, STOPPED AT AIDEN
LAIR TO CHANGE HORSES IN
NIGHT RIDE IN SURREY FROM MT.
MARCY TO NORTH CREEK TO TAKE
OATH OF PRESIDENT AT BUFFALO.

Aiden Lair Hotel ws owned by Mike Cronin who drove Teddy Roosevelt from here to North Creek where a special train was waiting to take him to Buffalo. In this hotel was the bar where Cronin is reputed to have sold several barrels of shoes from the team that took Roosevelt on that historic ride.

## WHAT IS OUR BOY UP TO?

During that first winter in North Hudson, as Jim Liberty, Jim Matherly and I were rebuilding the Wathsock barn into our office and living quarters, quite a few friends of mine from New York City came up to see what I was up to. Among these were two friends from Staten Island, Ed Ovensen and Mack Anderson. Ed was in the home repair business and Mack was an engineer for a firm which made dental equipment. Mack had served with the mounted Military Police during the war and loved horses. This opportunity for adventure was more than they could resist and late that spring, they both showed up and moved into the new apartment in the old Wathsock barn with me and my mother, who became their mother too. Thus we lived together for the next few years until Ed and Mack both married girls who worked for us.

MY WIFE EDNA

Edna Grace Blomquist is from Staten Island, New York. We were married in 1973. It was the first time for both of us.

In February 1973 I married Edna Blomguist a wonderful girl I had known in my younger days who also had never married. She moved into the apartment with my mother and me, after we had refurnished and refurbished it. My mother died one year later and my wife and I are still living in that apartment in the old Wathsock barn. We spend our winters at our home in Melbourne Beach, Florida.

# Chapter Four

## JULY 4, 1952
## FRONTIER TOWN
## OPENS TO THE PUBLIC

The indescribable beauty of autumn in the Adirondacks is something that must be seen to be appreciated. When the deep reds and the various shades of pink, orange and bright yellow of the hardwoods intermingle with the dark shades of the evergreen against bright blue skies, words simply are inadequate. Vermont is known for its fall color but we find that Vermont people come over to enjoy our beautiful fall colors in the Adirondacks. Spring in the Adirondacks also has a beautiful but different kind of color which is not so well known. As the snow begins to leave the mountains, the dull grays of the barren hardwoods ever so gradually take on varying shades of light green as the buds begin to appear. This produces an ever-changing pattern of green pastels which combined with the dark hues of the evergreens to produce a soft beauty that holds for me a special charm. The spring of 1952 was especially beautiful and its coming reminded me that I had better turn my attention to getting Frontier Town ready to receive visitors.

My excursions that winter into the old barns throughout the region had produced bountiful results. I had found churns, looms, treadmills, old furniture and furnishings and farm equipment and utensils aplenty to furnish all of my buildings. I had obtained two old parlor organs for our church and I had located three stagecoaches in useable condition.

Several thousand dollars worth of souvenirs had been delivered and they were ready to be put on display.

Since we were going to depict frontier life in action, frontier crafts were a must and I had been fortunate enough to line up several talented frontier craftsmen. It wasn't many years prior to my arriving in the Adirondacks in 1951 that spinning wheels were in common use there, so we had no trouble in finding spinning and weaving demonstrators.

An ad in the Albany paper produced a leather carver.

A trip to Alfred University in western New York State which had a course in ceramics produced a potter to demonstrate the shaping of pottery by hand on a kick wheel, a process that has remained unchanged since Bible times.

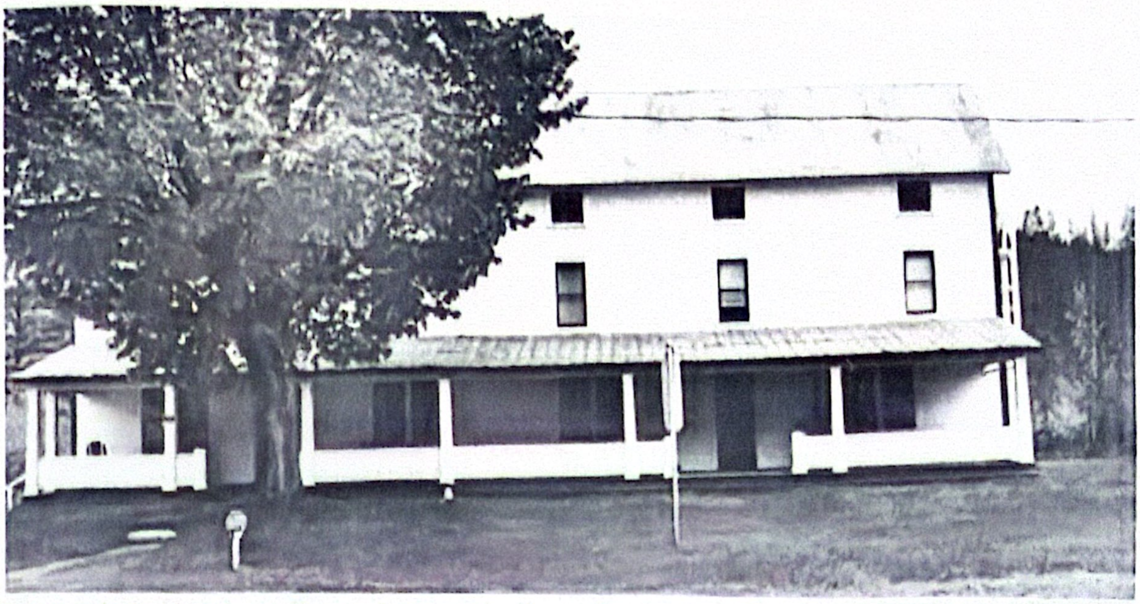
But I also wanted a glass blower, so I tried a little ad in one of New York City's newspapers to which I received just one reply from Brooklyn and in a very shaky hand which read, "Dear Mr. Bensen, I have blowed glass all my life and I can make anything you want."

Daniel J. Higgins

THE FRONTIER TOWN WEAVER'S SHOP
Frontier Town has had spinning and weaving demonstrations since opening in 1952. Today the shop is under the direction of Grace Hanneford (the wife of Poodles Hanneford) who is shown here at the loom. Our other demonstrator is carding wool. All of our dyes are produced from plants found in the Adirondacks.

I immediately went to the downtown section of Brooklyn and found Mr. Higgins to be a small, slim, 70-year-old Irishman with dark hair, living in a drab men's hotel. Danny was in good health but, of course, on account of his age, was unable to find work. He was living on Social Security and a tiny pension. He had no relatives and as far as I could determine, not a friend in the world.

Daniel J. Higgins had been born in Troy, New York and at the age of ten had gone to work in a local bottle factory as a helper to a glass blower. All of the bottles produced in those days were blown by mouth. By the time he was 15, Danny was blowing bottles. He next took a job in a factory which produced light bulbs. These were also blown by mouth at that time. I will never forget the look on Danny's face as he described to me his first sight of the machines that now produce light bulbs by the thousands. Said Danny, "It was enough to make me cry." Higgins next took a job in a shop that produced thermometers and scientific instruments. After that came a few years on the road with Danny giving glass blowing exhibitions with a carnival. Finally, Mr. Higgins found himself in the General Electric laboratory, Schenectady, New York, as a special assistant to General Electric's famous electrical genius, Steinmetz. Any special glass apparatus that Mr. Steinmetz might need in his experiments, it was Danny's job to produce. Danny told me that at that time Mr. Steinmetz was studying the lightening bug and had said to him, "If men could produce a mobile power plant that could make as much light with as little heat as the lightening bug, he will have come a long way in solving his lighting problems."



Provancha's Hotel, on Route 9 about half a mile north of Frontier Town had been closed for years. When Frontier Town opened in 1952 Lee Provoncha reopened his hotel to accommodate our glass blower Daniel Higgins and other Frontier Town employees.

Against the advice of my friends who said, "Suppose he gets sick, then you'll have him on your hands for the rest of his life," I hired Mr. Higgins, made arrangements for a room to be reserved for him in that Brooklyn hotel for the following winter, stopped at a place in New York which Danny knew about to pick up glass blowing equipment and materials and took Daniel J. Higgins to North Hudson. There I arranged for a room and meals for him in Lee Provoncha's country hotel which had been closed for years and which Lee had reopened to accommodate Frontier Town employees who were coming in.

The very next day we set Danny's equipment up in the glass blowing shop and he went to work building a supply of horses, sailing ships and glass knick-knacks of all kinds. We had one happy old man on our hands. His hotel was within walking distance and every day of the years he was with us, he came in early and stayed late, so happy was he to be back blowing glass.

Danny Higgins worked for me until his death 15 years later. He never missed a day and he was never a bit of trouble in any respect. His expert glass blowing delighted our visitors. It has always been a source of satisfaction to me to have provided jobs for Danny and many other old timers who were unable to find work because of age and were now able to find a new lease on life at Frontier Town.

Things were shaping up pretty well as opening day approached, but one serious problem arose. I had ordered frontier costumes in New York City for our ladies and Daniel Boone costumes for our men. The ladies' costumes showed up all right, but we never did receive the men's costumes. Realizing that we could not greet our visitors in street clothes, Ed Ovensen made a hasty trip to Glens Falls and came back with cowboy outfits for all of the men. We made cowboys out of six North Hudson lads who although they were familiar with work horses, knew nothing about riding horses.

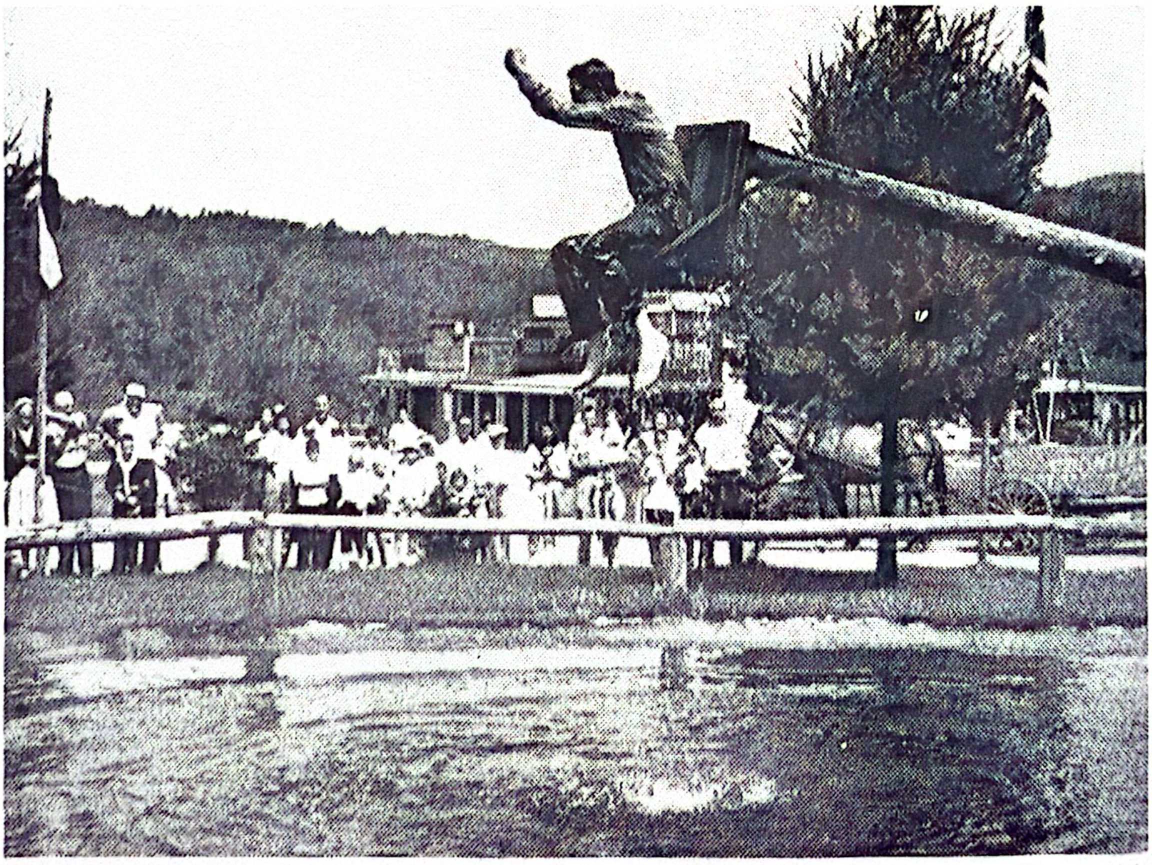
We had ready for service two of the three stagecoaches I had bought with Willie Bryan driving one and our friend Garry Hansen whom you have already met and who had presented himself as a capable teamster, driving the other.

Somehow, and I can't remember how, I heard that a man by the name of Bronco Charlie Miller, the last of the Pony Express Riders was living in the Bronx, N. Y. I went to the address given one afternoon and found him living alone in a ground floor apartment and glad to have someone to talk to. I spent about three hours with him. He told me that as a young man he was hired by the firm of Russell Majors and Wadell, the operators of the Pony Express as one of their riders. He explained that although it has written a colorful and dramatic page in American history, the Pony Express operated only about six months and then was put out of business by the completion of the Trans Continental Telegraph.

He described in detail his route and his equipment. One particular has stuck in my memory. I had thought that they had just stuffed the mail in a saddle bag. But Bronco Charlie told me that before putting it in the saddle bag the mail was carefully wrapped in a silk pouch that was completely waterproof.

His description of the operation was just about as we see it in the movies. It was a thrill to have talked to someone who had personally helped to write this brief but colorful chapter in our American history.

So it was that on opening day the Pony Express again came flying into Frontier Town carrying the mail, quickly changed to a fresh horse with a flying Pony Express mount and soon disappeared from sight. This



This outlaw was caught holding up a stage coach. Here, after a trial in the pillory with our visitors serving as the jury, he gets his just deserts in the ducking stool. This event has been popular with our visitors from opening day in 1952 until now.

is still one of our most popular features at Frontier Town and the Pony Express has been carrying our visitors' mail for over a quarter of a century.

Our plan of action described above, namely the capture, trial, ducking and raid of the stagecoach outlaws was explained to our employees and on July 4, 1952, we opened the gates. Unfortunately, by this time I had exhausted my $40,000 and had no money left for advertising so I stationed one of our homemade cowboys on horseback out on the highway to wave the passing motorists in. His task was complicated by the fact that, while our parking lot could be seen from the highway, Frontier Town was hidden in the valley. The purpose of this was to give it the proper remote woodsy atmosphere. Yet, somehow visitors began to come in.

I shall never forget that first morning. I was standing at the foot of the path by the ducking pool in my new cowboy outfit. I had never before worn anything like that in all of my life. My ten gallon hat felt very strange on my head, my cowboy pants felt tight and uncomfortable and my new pointed cowboy boots hurt my feet. But I was standing there, greeting people and trying to look nonchalant. A mother and a little boy came down the path. When they reached a point about 50 feet from me, the mother was talking to the boy when he dragged his feet to a halt. The mother then left him, came over to me and said very sweetly, "Would you mind posing for a picture with my little boy? You see, he's a bit timid about asking you because this is the first time in his whole life that he has ever seen a real cowboy."

Well, as you might imagine, that first day things didn't go very smoothly. The girls in the canteen burned the hot dogs, some of our homemade cowboys fell off their horses, Judge Roy Bean and our other actors were somewhat less than professional, the ladies in the various shops made mistakes in handing out change, not all of our activities took place exactly on time, and the boys on the ducking pole, in their enthusiasm, almost drowned the outlaw.

Willie Bryan, of course, proved to be an expert teamster. He provided lots of fun for his stagecoach passengers and brought them back into town laughing. Garry Hansen, our other stagecoach driver, on his first trip, brought his passengers back into town *walking* but fortunately for us, they were laughing too. You see, Garry was not as good a teamster as he had presented himself to be. He even had to get Willie Bryan to help him harness his team. But it was Garry, himself, who bolted the tongue to the stagecoach. Unfortunately, he put the bolt in upside down and left the nut off with the result that halfway down Dry Gulch Trail, the bolt dropped out and Garry and his team parted company with the stage and its passengers which were left standing on the trail as the horses pulled Garry right over the footboard and on his face down the road.

In spite of it all, our visitors seemed to enjoy themselves immensely. They liked the idea of participating in the action. They eagerly signed on as shotgun guards on the stageline and helped the sheriff defend the town from the Dalton boys and enthusiastically served on the jury which condemned the stagecoach outlaw and with gusto, too much gusto, as we mentioned above, they helped duck the outlaw in the ducking pool. In fact, between our shows we found them ducking each other in the ducking pool, which is a common practice today and always has been down through the years, especially among our French Canadian friends.

By the end of the first season, with no advertising except by word of mouth, 40,000 visitors had come through Frontier Town's gates and all of my Adirondack neighbors had stopped laughing at me. Most of them were working at Frontier Town.

# Chapter Five

## ATTENDANCE GROWS AND FRONTIER TOWN EXPANDS

Having brought in 40,000 visitors the first year with no promotion at all, it occurred to me that we ought to do a lot better if we could let folks know we were there. So after we closed for the season in 1952, I sought the advice of Mr. Joseph Horan, Director of Travel for the New York State Department of Commerce. Mr. Horan is past president of the National Association of Travel Organizations and is the leading authority on tourism in the United States. He was most helpful. He told me that a publicity job could best be done by a professional agency but warned that they were very expensive and there were things that I could do myself. He said that most newspapers of any size had a travel section which would print notices of new attractions and might even use a photograph. He also said that for a new idea in attractions like Frontier Town, some newspapers might even do a feature story.

I decided to see what the professionals had to say and went to one of the best known public relations firms in New York City. They promptly informed me that their services would cost me $40,000 a year and while they expected great publicity, they could guarantee nothing. So I went to work on publicity myself.

We had taken some color photographs during our first season. Armed with these, I decided to start at the top, the color section of the New York Sunday News which has the largest circulation of any newspaper in the United States, over four million.

I went in to see the Sunday Picture Editor, Mr. Ben Handel and told him the story of Frontier Town and its emphasis on visitor participation. He said, "That sure is a new wrinkle and we will do a story on it." So I pulled out my color photographs. He looked at them and said, "We only use our own photos. We will send a team of photographers up here this summer." He also said that they would not do an exclusive story on Frontier Town but would include other Adirondack attractions. I thanked Mr. Handel, invited him to come up and see Frontier Town for himself and left.

Now I was in a quandry. Obviously nothing could appear in the News until after the 1953 season since they weren't going to take their pictures until our 1953 season was underway. We needed something before the 1953 season opened to help our attendance that second year.

I knew that the competitor of the News was the New York Mirror which while it did not have a circulation of four million, did have a Sunday circulation of two and a half million, which is a rather respectable figure also. But suppose I persuaded the Mirror to use my pictures and do a story before we opened the 1953 season? That probably would eliminate the possibility of the News story the following year. Nevertheless, I decided to try the Mirror on the theory that "a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush." After all, something could come along that in Mr. Handel's mind would take precedence over Frontier Town and he might not do the Frontier Town story at all. So I went to the Mirror.

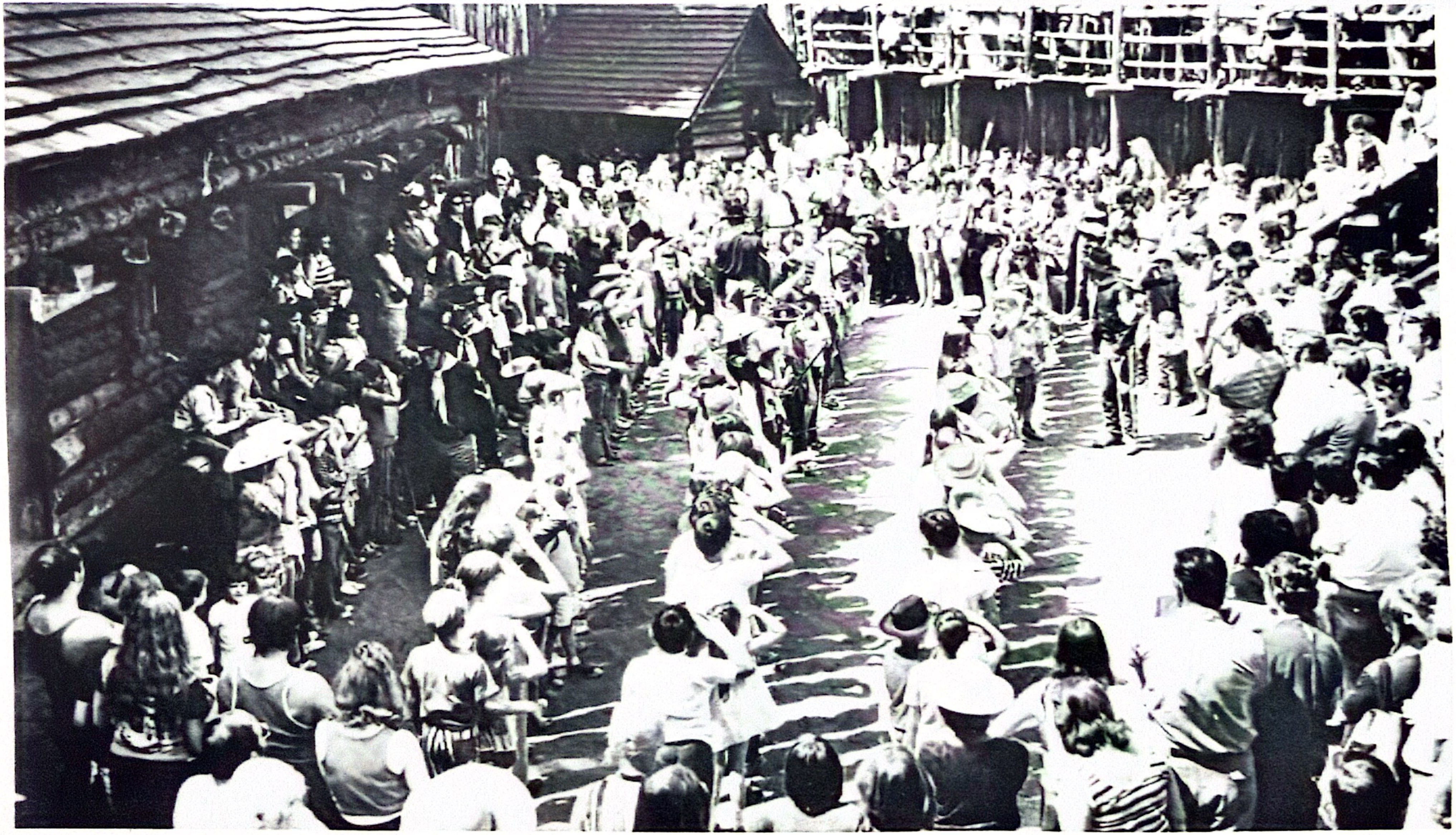
I was shown into the office of the Mirror's Sunday Picture Editor and he was impressed with the novelty of Frontier Town and with our pictures which he examined with a magnifying glass and pronounced fit for printing. He left me sitting at his desk and went into his boss' office. I could hear him trying to overcome his boss' objections that this was too commercial and they didn't do stories on one attraction but would have to include others. The Picture Editor argued that this was a complete story, the pictures were good and the idea of quitting a steady job would be of interest to a lot of their readers. Presently he came out of the boss' office with a discouraged look on his face. He sat down at his desk and told me he couldn't persuade his boss to use the story. After we talked some more, he suddenly picked up the pictures again and went back into the boss' office. This time the argument was louder and my friend was shouting louder than his boss. He said, "Look, we sell papers by attracting readers with good stories. This is the best story we have had in the color section of the Mirror in a long time. It would be a mistake to turn it down." The argument quieted down and two or three minutes later, he came back to his desk with a look of grim satisfaction on his face and announced, "We are going to use it and it will appear at the time you open next spring."

I thanked him and left, assuming that this would end any possibility that the Sunday News would do a story, but comforting myself with the "bird in hand is worth two in the bush" idea.

Encouraged by this success in New York City, I decided to try all the leading newspapers in the rest of the state. I went to Albany, Utica, Syracuse, Rochester and Buffalo. All did feature stories about Frontier Town. So I went to Montreal (Frontier Town is only about two hours from Montreal) and Ottawa, Canada. The leading papers in Montreal, both French and English and the leading paper in Ottawa, the Ottawa Journal, also did feature stories on Frontier Town.

The result was that during our 1953 season, over 100,000 visitors made their way to the old Wathsock farm in that remote part of the Adirondacks to see Frontier Town. This was an increase of 250% over our first season.

Incidentally, it was toward the end of our 1953 season that a camera crew from the Disney Studios, California, appeared at Frontier Town and asked my permission to film all of our buildings and activities. Under the impression that we were going to be included in one of their fine movies, we put the entire Town at their disposal. Two years later, when Disney Land opened, we discovered that instead of including Frontier Town in one of their movies, they had included a section in their Disney Land which they called Frontier Land.



FRONTIER TOWN'S FORT CUSTER

Here in Fort Custer young visitors who have signed up for the Seventh Cavalry are put through close order drill. Colonel Custer's Headquarters is the building on the left.

FRONTIER TOWN
WESTERN OUTFITTERS

Because of the increasing attendance, we had a problem. How can we spread the crowds out? We had to expand. During the first two seasons it was discovered that our visitors just loved cowboys, so at the close of the 1953 season, we began Frontier Town's expansion by building the first part of our cowboy section of Frontier Town which we called Prairie Junction.

I had assumed that the beautiful color layout on Frontier Town that appeared in the New York Sunday Mirror on June 7, 1953 ended any possibility that the News would do a story. Imagine my surprise when towards the end of the 1953 season a camera crew from the News showed up and did a thorough color photo coverage of Frontier Town. On June 15th, 1954, just about when we were ready to open for our third season, there appeared in the New York Sunday News center color section, not just a two page spread, but a four page color spread including a map and this four page spread was devoted about 90% to Frontier Town. Once again, in 1954, our attendance took a big jump and once again we expanded by adding another street to our new cowboy section, Prairie Junction.

FRONTIER TOWN
SHOP

This photo taken in 1955 shows that at that time Frontier Town had about ninety employees. Now we have about 300.

## THE RAILROAD COMES TO FRONTIER TOWN

The following year, that is in 1954, we decided that we needed a steam railroad in our Frontier Town. I was discussing my plans for a railroad one day while having lunch with our bankers at the Bank of New York on Wall Street, when one of the men from the bank mentioned that he had seen a story the previous Sunday in the center color spread of the New York Sunday Mirror that told of a man in Syosset, Long Island, who collected steam engines. When I expressed interest in looking this steam engine man up, the gentleman from the bank went home, looked up his newspaper and called me that evening with the details. He told me that the steam engine collector's name was William Willock.

By 9:00 o'clock the next morning I was at Mr. Willock's estate in Syosset. He turned out to be a man who loves steam engines and he was very glad to show me all the engines he had collected. He had steam lawnmowers, steam farm engines, steam automobiles, a steam electric power plant and many other types of steam and hot air engines in buildings spread all over his estate. He also had two steam locomotives of 24 inch gauge. When I told him that I would like to buy one of his locomotives and give visitors rides on the railroad, because he felt that everyone should have the experience of riding on a steam train (in 1954, steam was fast disappearing from our country's rail roads), he sold me his 13 ton locomotive which he had put into perfect condition, for $3,500, probably less than he had spent on reconditioning it.

I had Pete McKenzie, my neighbor in North Hudson who had a trailer for moving his bulldozers, pick up the locomotive and bring it to Frontier Town. That fall, we laid our track, built five 30 foot cars and a railroad station and by the 1955 season, our railroad was in operation. This too helped spread out the crowds.

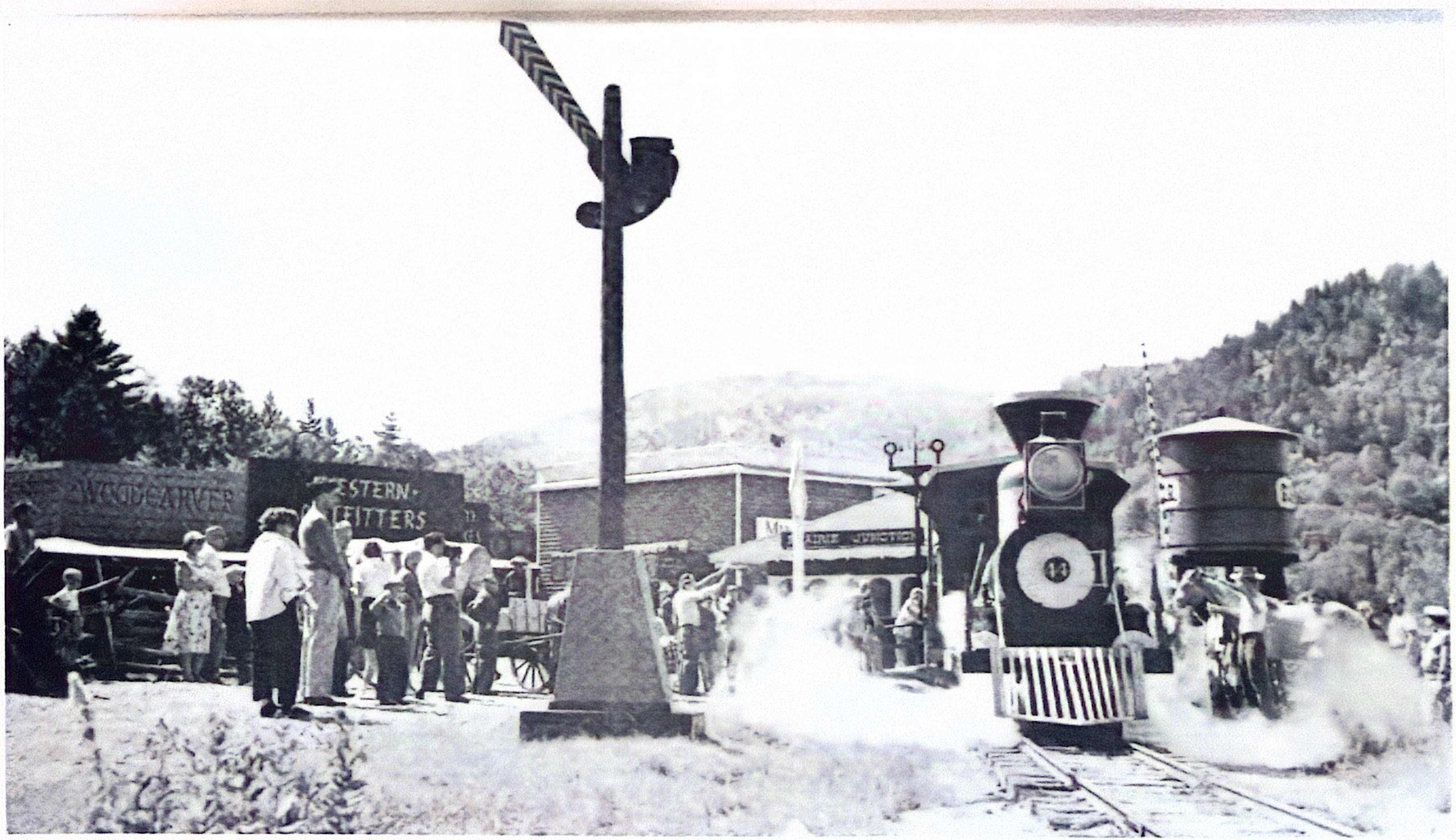
That locomotive is still running at Frontier Town and to date has carried millions of passengers down Redskin Valley. Over the years, Mr. Willock has been a most helpful friend in supplying wheels and parts that we have needed and he has always been most helpful with his advice. I gratefully acknowledge his help. At present, being unable to find another locomotive, we are building two of our own. Incidentally, this is also true of our stagecoaches. Unable to buy any more, we had to build our own stagecoaches and we now are operating the largest fleet of stagecoaches in the country and to date that stageline has carried millions of people down Dry Gulch Trail.

Parenthetically, Mr. Willock finally grew tired of new developments crowding in around him at Syosset, so he moved all of his steam equipment to a large estate he bought at Chestertown, Maryland, on the shores of Chesapeake Bay. He has now added small steamboats to his collection and he has all the room he can possibly need to expand his collection of steam engines.

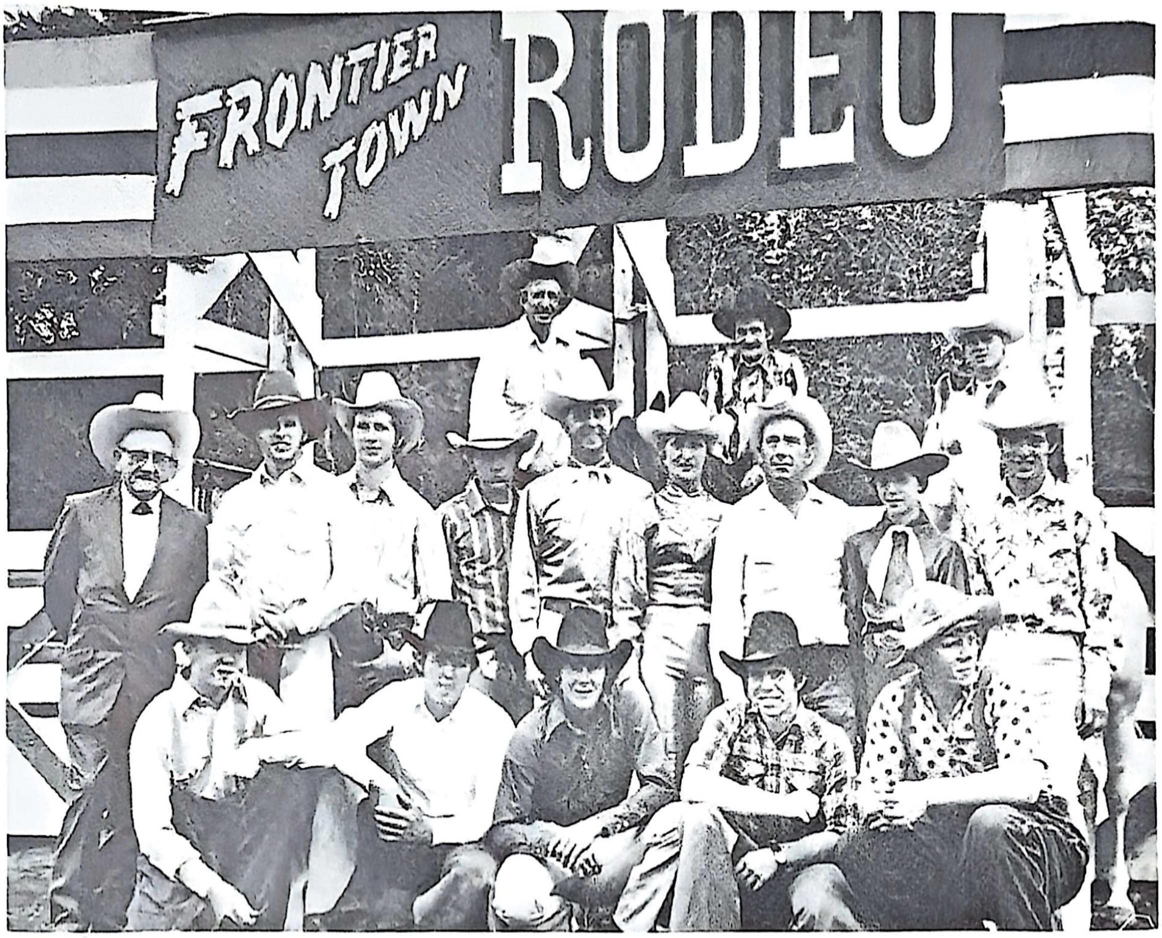
## THE RODEO COMES TO FRONTIER TOWN

In 1956, continuing our expansion program, we built a large rodeo arena. Obviously, we could not make our homemade cowboys into rodeo cowboys. We needed the real thing. So I went to Lucerne, near Lake George, which has the largest collection of Dude Ranches in the country and asked how I could locate rodeo cowboys. I was told by a manager of one of the dude ranches that an ad in Hoofs and Horns, the Rodeo Cowboy's Association's newspaper, would get me more cowboys than I could use. However, said my informant, "It will be your problem to pick out the good ones."

As a result of our ad, we soon were receiving applications from rodeo cowboys all over the country. You see, when a cowboy enters a bucking horse, bull riding or calf roping contest in a rodeo, he must pay a sizable entry fee and unless he wins, he loses his money. Now, the only experience he can get is in these rodeos. In other words, he must pay heavily while he is gaining experience.



Old 44 heads out of the station at prairie junction for a trip down Redskin Valley. Our Prairie Junction — Dry Gulch Railroad has carried millions of passengers during the last quarter of a century. Currently our engineer is Earl O'Neil who retired from the Republic Steel Corp. and has been running Old 44 for more than fifteen years.



Our rodeo cowboys come from Texas, Montana, Wyoming and other Western States and Canada and from Florida which today is second only to Texas in cattle production and has the largest ranch in the world.

On the other hand, at Frontier Town we pay our riders a salary and permit them to ride our stock (and we have excellent stock) every day. Over the years, we have had cowboys from Texas, (including members of college rodeo teams in Texas), Montana, Wyoming, Oregon, Arizona, and all other states of the west and from Florida which many people are surprised to learn is second only to Texas today in the production of cattle and produces a lot of cowboys. While working at Frontier Town, of course, they not only gain experience in rough stock riding, but we pay them while they gain this experience. Some of them have, as a result of this training, gone on to become top money winners in the rodeo circuits, as we will show later.

## COWBOYS CAN TAKE IT

Rodeo cowboys are tough hombres. They arrive in the spring with two hand bags; one contains their meager supply of clothing, the other stretch bandages, liniment and pain killer. Eagerly they exchange information on the latest in these aids which will permit them to ride the rough stock even though injured. Fortunately, we have had few accidents in our rodeos over the years but one day a horse fell on a rider and when I took him to the hospital, he was found to have a broken leg. Just then Ed Ovensen delivered another cowboy to the hospital, left him in my care and went back to Frontier Town. Soon the doctor came out with the leg X-rays of the second victim, shaking his head. The doctor said, "Believe it or not, this lad has sprained his broken leg." That boy had been riding with a broken bone in his leg for about two weeks

# Chapter Six

# FRONTIER AVIATION

As Frontier Town grew, I found it necessary to get around faster so I went back to Staten Island and learned to fly. I bought a Cessna 180 but had to go out to the factory in Wichita, Kansas to pick it up. Since I had only a student's certificate at that time, the man who sold me the plane accompanied me to Wichita. My adventures in flying began on that first trip with the new plane.

There was some delay in the paperwork so we did not get off the ground at Wichita until late in the morning. We made one stop for fuel at Indianapolis and then straight on to Staten Island, New York City.

Darkness overtook us over the Allegheny Mountains just at the time our radio transmitter failed. However, the weather was good and we soon picked up the Jersey Turnpike and followed it north to New York City. Flying up the Turnpike, we passed a number of airports with lighted runways and I urged my pilot to land and top off the gas tanks, but he steadfastly refused saying we were okay on gas. Our airport on Staten Island was unlighted and my pilot asked me if I could find it in the dark. I told him that given a little time, I was sure I could. As I began to look for lighted landmarks, he said, "Now we've got to hurry up, Art, we're low on gas." I replied, "Well, there's Newark airport, practically under our left wing and lit up like a Christmas tree. Let's play safe and set it down there." He said, "No, we're okay as long as you don't take too long." Now, neither he nor I had seen that aircraft before that morning and he could not possibly know how accurate the gas gauges were. Whenever I buy a new car, it takes time for me to learn whether when the gas tank says empty, it means it's out of gas or has two gallons left or whether it has four gallons left. I did not know until the next morning how close we came to disaster that evening.

I picked up a well lighted landmark and followed the highway to a hangar I recognized as being right at the end of the runway of the airport we were looking for. The runway, of course, was in complete darkness. I told my pilot where the runway was and he turned to the right, on the downward leg, paralleling the runway which I could just manage to keep in view as we flew along next to it at about 500 feet of altitude. At the far end of the runway, away from the highway was a heavily wooded area. As we flew over the wooded area, and made a 180° turn on to the final approach for landing, I announced that I had lost sight of the runway. He turned on the landing lights and said, "It will show up in the lights in a minute, Art" to which I replied, "You had better pull up right now. Those lights are lighting up the tops of the trees and there's no sign of the runway. Let's go back to the highway and come in right over that hangar and we will be lined up with the runway which will

Frontier Town Airpark is on the air maps and open to the public. Here a Cassna touches down.

show up in the lights as soon as we pass over the building. What does it matter if we come in down wind, the wind is very light."

He followed my suggestion. We swung out across the highway, made our 180° turn and came in over my building. The lights picked up the runway and we set her down easily. I called my brother-in-law, Oscar Blomquist, who came out and picked us up and we took my pilot to Newark Airport where his car was parked. My brother-in-law had been a Colonel in the Air Force with a squadron of photo reconnaissance planes under his command and of course he had to inspect my new toy. So we drove back to the Staten Island Airport, climbed into the 180 and began to taxi up and down the runway just to try the plane out. We had no intention of taking off. We were having a great time but the landing lights were blazing right into the house near the runway and the man of the house, who happened to be a volatile Italian, came out waving a carving knife. He threatened to call the police. He was scared to death. When he saw the lights coming at him, he thought we had just landed, overshot the runway and were going to crash into his house. We apologized, tied the plane down and got out of there as fast as we could.

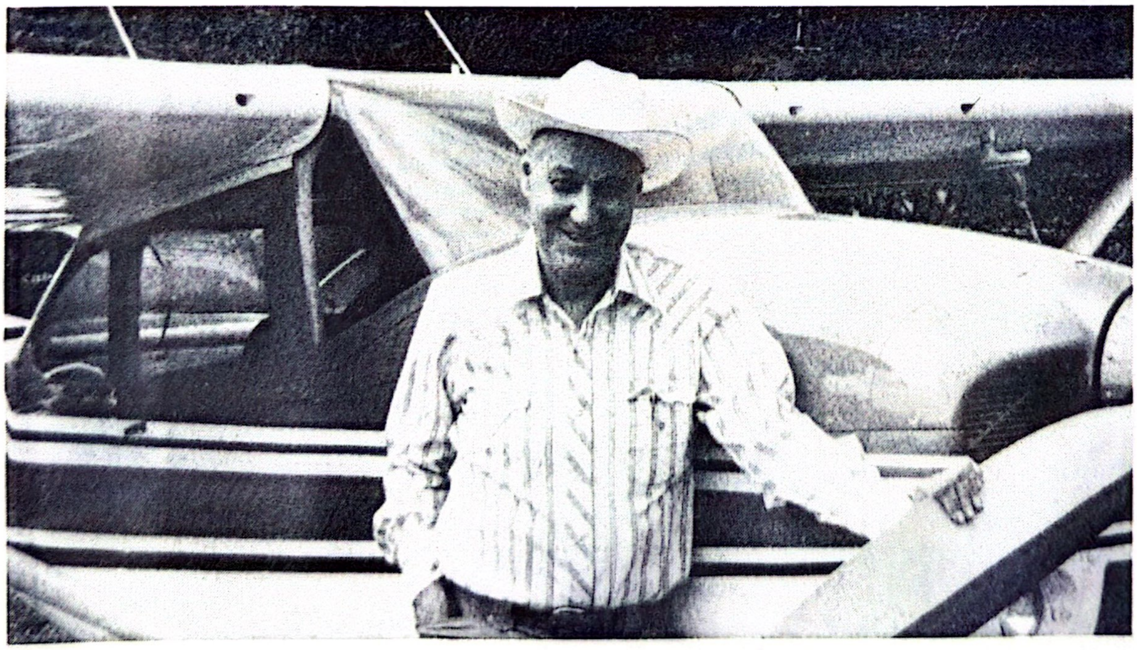
The next day I went out to the airport and began to taxi over to the gas pump. I had gone about 300 feet when I ran completely out of gas and the engine quit. About a year later, I was saddened to learn that my pilot friend had been killed in a flying accident out west.

We built an airport right in Frontier Town and to date I have over 3,000 hours in the air. If we need something from New York in a hurry, I leave at the crack of dawn and can be back long before noon. The 180 has a cruising speed of 160 miles an hour and a top speed of 180 miles an hour level flight. The flight to New York takes about one and three-quarter hours, depending on wind conditions.

I used the plane to make several hurried trips to Florida. On one occasion to hire a special rodeo performer, on another to buy a piece of property that was very important to us. I used the 180 to do advertising for Frontier Town by towing a long banner behind the plane. I also used the 180 to make aerial photographs of Frontier Town.

And I used the 180 to save money on our liability insurance. Let me explain. Our insurance agent found that his best companies were very reluctant to take our public liability coverage and he had to place us with Lloyds of London for a couple of years. However, he kept working on those companies of his and we kept developing an excellent safety record at Frontier Town. We were informed one day that Lloyds was going to increase all their liability premiums for all of their clients including us in spite of our excellent safety record. Our premiums were going to be increased by $7,500 per year. Our agent decided that this was the time to get those good companies of his to take over our coverage. So he persuaded two officials in the New York office who were capable of making this decision to come up to Frontier Town for an inspection. He told them that I would fly them up.

Now, flying up the Hudson River and through the Adirondacks offers some of the most beautiful scenery in the world and this appealed strongly to these two men who were glad to find an excuse to get away from their desks for an adventure of this kind. I picked them up and we had a lovely flight to Frontier Town. As we flew up the river, past New York's skyscrapers, I pointed out to them the building in which their office was located. We soon passed the lovely Palisades and on over the Bear Mountain Bridge. We swung over for a look at the military academy at West Point, then across to the east side of the river for a view of Sing Sing Prison. Then on past the New York State capitol at Albany and on into the Adirondack Mountains with a good view of Lake Champlain and Lake George and the hundreds of other lakes in the Adirondacks, and on into the lovely high peak area and then down between the mountains onto the airport at Frontier Town.



Flying has been of great help in operating Frontier Town and I now have about three thousand hours in the air.

I spent the rest of the day showing them around Frontier Town. They inspected our rodeo stands, our buildings, and other facilities and seemed favorably impressed. They spent the night at our motel and we planned to take them back to the city the next day.

However, the next morning, when we checked the weather, we found that there were intermittent thunderstorms all along the route. I assured them I had a healthy respect for weather and promised not to put them into the slightest danger but that I had had several reports that the thunderstorms were scattered. It was clear to me that by flying around the localized thunderstorms, we would have no trouble getting through.

As we flew south, we found that the reports were accurate. The thunderstorms were localized. Although Lake George was completely socked in, there was clear weather to the west and we flew in sunshine around Lake George and then back to the river. Further south, we found a thunderstorm on the east side of the river so we swung across to the west side, and so on, all the way down to New York. When we arrived at Newark Airport, we found it in the sunshine but Staten Island Airport just ahead was having a very heavy rainstorm. I said we would just try the weather on Staten Island and if it proved to be difficult at all, we would simply swing back and land at Newark. We found the rain over Staten Island was very heavy but it was the kind of rain I could see through and I had no trouble finding the runway and setting the 180 down to a smooth landing. It began to rain even harder as I taxied over to the gas pump. I find it's a good idea to fill the tanks upon landing so that if I have to take off in a hurry, I am ready to go. But when I pulled up to the gas pumps, it was raining so hard that the attendant decided not to come out. We sat there waiting about 15 minutes for the rain to let up. But it began to rain harder than ever and I noted that the wind was picking up, too. So I taxied over to the tie-down area and signaled persistently for the attendant to come out and tie us down, which he finally did. Afterwards, the three of us made a mad dash for the office. We hadn't been in the office more than three minutes before a violent wind came up and flipped over on their backs three airplanes which had not been tied down.

Evidently we had made a favorable impression because their company took on our insurance and we avoided that $7,500 increase that we had been facing. So in a few years, the 180 paid for itself in the savings on our liability premium alone.

## WINTER FLYING

Winter flying in the Adirondacks is a wonderful adventure. The mountains at that time, of course, offer a completely different kind of beauty than they do during the other three seasons. Flying between those snow covered peaks in the warm snugness of the plane with the outside temperatures registering far below zero is a cozy experience. Winter flying, however, involves a lot of work. Plowing deep snow on the runway 50 feet wide soon piles the snow up along the edges to a depth that almost reaches the high wing of the Cessna. Landing under those conditions with a slippery runway is like fitting the plane into a groove. It requires the utmost care and accuracy.

## SEARCH AND RESCUE

In case of emergency, we are glad to put our plane at the service of our neighbors without charge. We are frequently called on by the State Conservation Department to search for lost hunters or to spot forest fires before they can get out of hand.

A few years ago I received a call from the Conservation Department reporting that a helicopter which had been carrying materials to one of the fire towers on one of the high peaks was down. We were fortunate enough to locate the copter in less than two hours. The machine was finally brought out and the crew was rescued.

On another occasion, we were called upon to help search for the crew of a B52 bomber from the Plattsburg Air Force Base, 60 miles north of us. They had bailed out somewhere in our area of the Adirondacks. The pilotless plane had continued on across Lake Champlain and crashed in the mountains of Vermont. An official of the Plattsburg Air Force Base asked permission to set up search headquarters on our airport and we, of course, were glad to oblige. Planes from Civil Air Patrol Centers all around us, including those from my own Civil Air Patrol Squadron on Staten Island, arrived and were based on our airport. It looked like Kennedy International with all those planes and Air Force helicopters on the ground there. My Civil Air Patrol friends from Staten Island just couldn't get used to mountain flying. They said, "We take off, climb 3,000 feet and we're still looking up to the tops of the mountains."

I'm happy to report that the entire crew of the B52 was found and rescued. I received a citation from the Air Force for my flying time in the search and for the use of our airport in this successful operation.

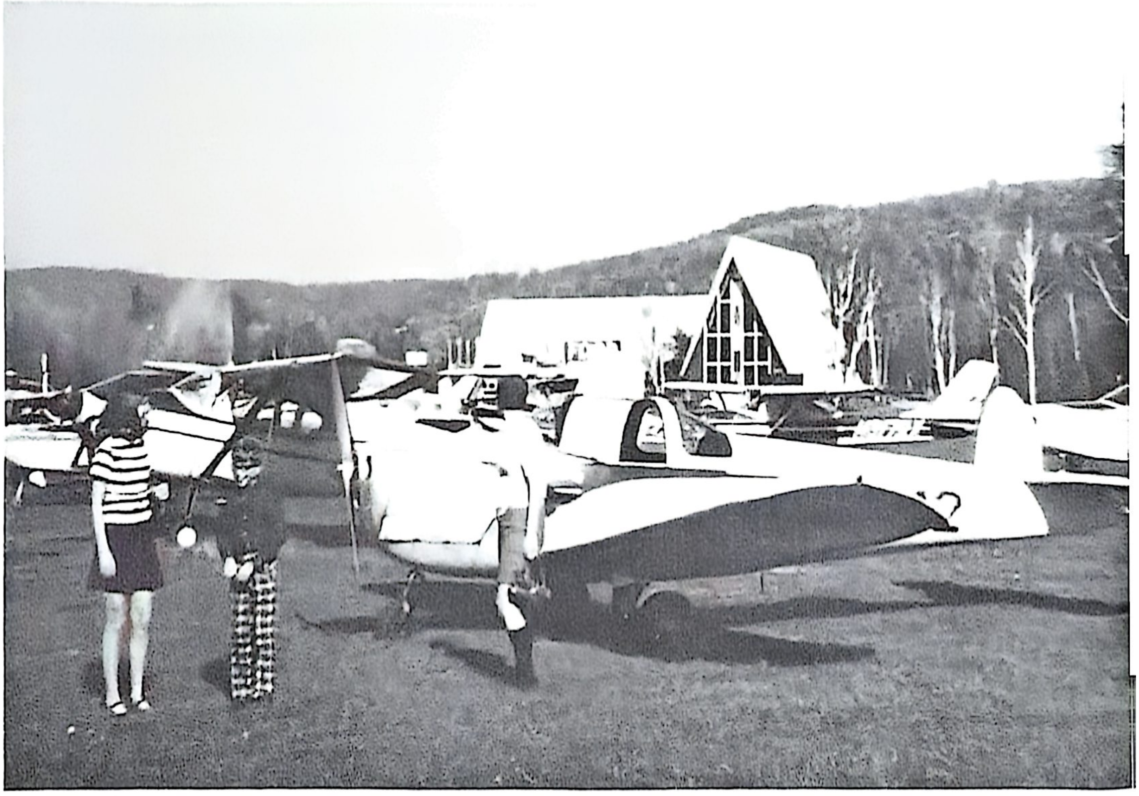
## FLYING THE OLD TIMERS

One of my greatest pleasures in flying has been the opportunity of taking my old time Adirondack neighbors for their first look at their old familiar mountains from the air. They enjoy immensely looking down on these mountains on which they have been lumbering and hunting for many years.

One day I went over to Frank Palmer's home and said, "Frank, how about you and I climbing Mt. Marcy today?" Now Marcy is the highest mountain in the Adirondacks. Frank Palmer was about 90 years of age at this time and he replied, "Art, my mountain climbing days are over. As you know, I've been up Marcy many times and all the other peaks too, but these old legs of mine aren't what they used to be and I'm afraid that these ole eyes of mine will never again see the top of Marcy." I said, "Frank, you just come with me and I'll prove to you that your mountain climbing days are not over." Without another word, he got into my car and I took him over to the airport, drove right up to the side of the plane and sat him in the co-pilot's seat. You should have seen the smile on his face.

I asked him if this was his first flight. He replied, "Yes, but it almost wasn't." He explained that years ago when he was supervisor of North Hudson, after a Board of Supervisors Meeting at the county seat of Elizabethtown, it was announced that a man with an airplane was taking up passengers at the nearby town of Jay and all of the supervisors decided to go over there and take a ride. The pilot was flying an old fashioned biplane and could take only one passenger at a time. Just whe Frank's turn was about to come up, the man behind him asked Frank if he would mind if he stepped ahead of him because his wife was coming to pick him up. Good natured Frank agreed. "But" he said, "When the plane was coming back to the field, he ran into the steeple of the Baptist church and busted a piece off one of his wings and though he landed all right, I never got my ride."

Now I find that most people on their first flight are very nervous and quite disoriented. Not ole Frank. He was just as much at home in the air as though he had been flying for years. The first thing I did was to fly over Marcy. His eyes did once more see the top of that mountain. In fact, his eyesight was remarkably good. He said, "Now, Art, if you go to the right a little, you see that little lake down there—well that is Lake Tear of the Clouds. That little brook running out of it that you can see heading to the south, that's so small you can jump over it is the beginning of the big Hudson River that flows past the skyscrapers of New York City 300 miles away from here. Now you swing over to the right there a little bit and let me take a look." He gazed down for a few minutes without saying anything and then said, "My goodness, look at what them beavers are doing down there. They've got that whole place flooded." Then he said, "Now you move over this way a little, let me see what's happened to that area I lumbered 50 years ago." I flew him all around the mountains for about an hour and a half and he had a wonderful time revisiting the places that he had known so well over the years. I then flew him over to Lake Champlain and landed at Westport and took him in to the restaurant there for lunch. After lunch, I flew him down to Lake George area and Frank Palmer had a wonderful time that afternoon, seeing his beloved mountains for the first time from the air.



When the weather is good there's lots of activity at our Frontier Town Airpark. Our "A" frame building is the largest in New York State measuring sixty feet to the peak. It houses our cafeteria and gift shop.

## AN ERRONEOUS WEATHER REPORT

One of my most exciting and most dangerous flying experiences took place a few years ago in a flight to Rochester, New York. The Stecker Traung Company which prints our Frontier Town color brochures, had called and asked me to come out for a final okay of the brochure before they set up their color presses to run off the two million copies we had ordered. The weather was quite hazy but visibility was about ten miles. I took off and headed southwest to pick up the New York State Thruway at Utica.

As I was passing the airport at Utica just off my right wing, because I saw some dark clouds ahead, I gave some thought to landing there but instead I picked up the microphone and asked the flight service station at Utica for a weather report along the route to Rochester. They told me that they had a very fresh report and reported that there was not less than ten miles of visibility all along the route, the minimum ceiling was 5,000 feet and that in Rochester there was 15 miles of visibility and a ceiling of 10,000 feet. So although the sky seemed dark, I assumed I could fly around it and come back on course and enjoy the good weather they were reporting on the way to Rochester. So I continued west over the Thruway until I approached the dark area in the sky. Then noticing that the sky to the north looked quite clear, I swung to that direction, intending to go around. I had been on the new course but about ten minutes when I suddenly found myself socked in on all sides. I had perhaps one and a half miles of visibility in all directions and I could see down but I was in the middle of a dark black envelope that was closing in tightly all around. I decided to find a place to land before it closed in on me completely and left me with no visibility at all.

Below me was a two lane concrete road with no power lines and no traffic. I could have landed there, but I knew that would result in arrest, but worse than that it would mean that the plane would have to be dismantled. The State Police will never let a plane that's landed on a highway take off again. So while I had a few moments more before I made my decision, I looked around and over to my left I noticed a dirt road and went over to investigate. I soon noted that this road had some curves and hills that would make it impossible to land on it. But right alongside this road, I noticed a level field with some very short Christmas trees growing on it, trees about 18 inches high or so. This field was about 1200 feet long with a very clear approach that would permit the entire 1200 to be used. However, at the far end of the field was a 50 foot drop into a hollow filled with huge boulders. Knowing that a field that looked very smooth from the air could be quite rough and that on a rough field I could be in danger of losing my brake lines which on my 180 with its cross wind landing gear were hung from the bottom, I decided that if I found I could not stop before reaching the end of the field, I would go to the right and cross the road, on the other side of which was a field which sloped gradually downhill to a ditch, beyond which ground rose abruptly. I made the decision to land in the field. The weather was closing in fast and it was beginning to rain very hard. As I came in under power with full flaps at the lowest possible flying speed, I set the plane down at the very beginning of that field. It was rough, and I lost both brake lines at the first touchdown. I dumpe the flaps and glued it on the ground but with no brakes, I could no stop within the length of the field, so as I approached the end, I angle to the right, wallowed through a shallow ditch at a rather slow speed tore through the barb wire fence, crossed the road, wallowed through th ditch on the other side, and began to roll slowly down a very sligh incline to the little ditch at the bottom. By the time I hit the ditch, I ha slowed almost to a stop and the spinner of the prop bumped gently against the bank on the other side. By now it was raining cats and dogs so I just sat in the plane waiting for the rain to stop.

In a few minutes, a pickup truck pulled up and a man got out an ran down in the rain to see how I was doing. I assured him I was perfectly okay and he ran back to his truck and left. After about an hour or so the rain let up a bit and I walked down the road a half mile or so to a farmhouse on the left side of the road. Mr. Larry Benkinny, the owner was home and received me very cordially and told me he had a tractor and that I was welcome to leave the plane at his place. He told me I was in the town of Camden, New York.

We returned to the plane with a rope and his tractor and pulled the 180 down the road and tied it down on his front lawn. I called an airplane mechanic who showed up in a short time and we inspected the plane together. We found that the only damage was to the propeller which had to be replaced and to the brakes. The right landing gear was bent slightly but there was no hurry about changing that. So I gave him the job of repairing the plane and he told me he would let me know when it was ready to be flown off. He gave me a ride into the town where I picked up the bus and continued on my journey to Rochester When I arrived in Rochester that afternoon and inquired about the weather, I was informed that Rochester had been socked in and the rain had been coming down heavily from 6:00 o'clock that morning. Somebody had given me a very erroneous weather report.

About two weeks later, the mechanic called me and informed me that the repairs had been completed and the plane was ready to fly.

I went back to the plane and checked over that dirt road I was going to use for my takeoff run. As I had noted from the air, it had curves and hills. But the biggest problem was that at one point for a distance of about 100 feet, it was cut into a hill so that on one side, about five feet from the roadway itself, it dropped off downhill while on the other side it rose uphill steeply. Now there was a barb wire fence running along the entire distance that I was going to use for my takeoff run. Mr. Benkinny lent me a chainsaw and gave me a permission to cut off the tops of the fence posts above the top wire for the entire distance. However, for the 100 feet where the ground rose so sharply on that one side, cutting off the fence post tops would not have permitted my wing to clear the fence which was run up over that bump of ground and I knew that at that point I would have to be very careful and swing all the way out and put my wheel right on the very edge, almost, of that drop off for that distance of 100 feet, then swing back on the road and complete my takeoff run Calculations showed that if I did get all the way to the right, I would clear the fence by inches. There were five people there to help me at that time. Fortunately the State Police hadn't shown up to put an end to all this idea of taking off from the roadway. They would have made me take the plane apart. So I was anxious to get off as quickly as possible. I warmed the engine and taxied out onto the road, only to find that I had no brakes. Yes, the brake lines had been replaced and I had good firm brake pedals but evidently the mechanic had failed to note the pucks which correspond to brake lining on an automobile had dropped out and I had no brakes at all. Well, I got my five people to help me turn the plane down the road and I slowly taxied down to the point where I was going to start my takeoff run. Those helping me held the plane back so that it didn't pick up too much speed downhill and I gunned the engine and climbed the next rise. On the following downhill portion, they again let me down by hand power. We got down to the point where we were to begin the takeoff run and they turned the plane for me, I taxied up the road as slowly as I could. Before I got to the first downhill portion, I came to my 100 foot part where I had to cut all the way to the right, to clear the fence. I managed to do that all right so my calculations proved correct. I got back into the road slowly, drifted down the hill and climbed the next hill up to the lawn of the house where I had parked the plane. My helpers came back to me there and once again helped me turn the plane around and we brought it back to the point where we were going to begin the takeoff run. There they helped me turn it around again. Just at that critical time, the wind, which had been a headwind, the kind of wind a flyer wants for his takeoffs and landings, suddenly veered around 180° and became a tailwind. Fortunately it wasn't very strong but under these circumstances, taking off down wind wasn't very desirable at all. However, I was not about to give up at this time so I thanked my friends and said good bye, gunned the engine gently, got around the first curve, cleared my 100 foot obstacle by moving all the way to the right hand edge of the shoulder, got back on the road and opened the throttle as I headed downhill. By the time I reached the top of the first rise, the 180 had achieved flying speed and took off like a bird.

I had a very pleasant flight over the Balston Spa Airport, not far from Saratoga, New York and landing on the long paved runways there without brakes proved no problem at all. I taxied slowly up to the hangar and turned the 180 over to my friend, Joe Siska, who had always done my annual inspections and repairs and told him about the brakes and asked him to let me know when the plane would be ready. I then caught a bus to Frontier Town and my adventure was over.

## VISITORS CAN FLY IN

Our Frontier Town Airpark has a paved runway, is on the air maps and is open to the public. When the weather is good around us, it is not unusual to find a lot of planes coming in. People like to watch them take off and land as they enjoy their meals in our cafeteria. The restaurant and motels are also within walking distance of the airport.

## FRONTIERS OF AVIATION

I selected the name of Frontier Town so that I would have wide latitude in showing life on America's various historical frontiers.

As a result of my interest in flying, I decided to add the Frontiers of Aviation to Frontier Town. I began by starting to collect old or unusual aircraft. I had bought one old Myers bi-plane and two other aircraft when the State of New York seized a portion of our land that made the development of our Frontiers of Aviation impossible. I had no choice but to sell those planes and give up my Frontiers of Aviation.

# Chapter Seven

# FRONTIER TOWN HAS LOTS OF ANIMALS

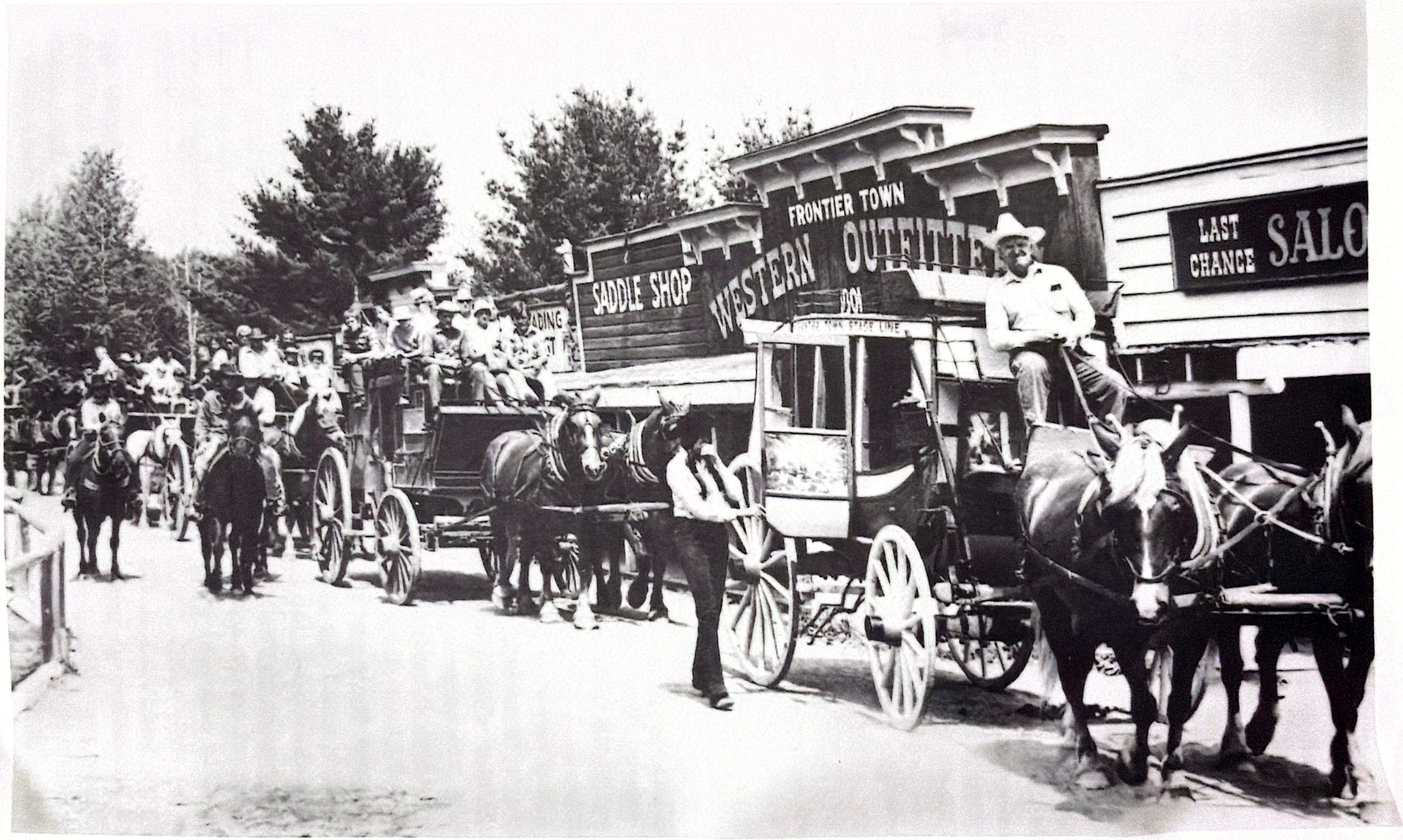
The day we opened Frontier Town I noticed a father and mother and their little boy and girl watching with great interest as stage driver Willie Bryan harnessed his team. I walked over to them and said, "I see your children like horses." Said the father, "It's the first time in their life they've ever actually seen horses." This surprised me and I asked how that could possibly be and he said, "Well, when I was a kid, the milkman and the bakeryman delivered their products in our neighborhood by horse and wagon so we were used to seeing horses around. But today, in thousands of new communities like ours, the milkmen and breadmen deliver their products in trucks. We never see a horse. Millions of kids are growing up in this country never having seen a horse except on TV."

We find that all of our visitors love horses. Frontier Town is a horse powered town. We have stagecoach horses, rodeo horses, riding horses for our employees, riding horses and ponies for all of our guests, horses and ponies to power our merry-go-rounds and horses to saw wood in our treadmill and high schooled horses that are especially trained to give performances. There are over 100 horses on the grounds at Frontier Town. I believe this is the largest working herd in the east. Horses are wonderful animals. In the field a horse feeds on grass and it is always a wonder to me how a horse can graze all day long and doesn't get sick from over eating.

Have you ever considered what a wonder hay is? God has designed this marvelous food to keep horses and other farm animals fed during the winter when grasses do not grow. A man cuts and dries his hay and puts it into bales or in a haystack right out in the field and his animals will feed on it, relish it and thrive on it all winter long. Think of it! No refrigeration or special care required. Without it no farm depending on horsepower could survive in northern climates.

You've heard the expression, "He is feeling his oats." This expression is commonly used, for example, when a man is promoted to a new job and begins to throw his weight around. When a horse is put to work he must be fed oats in addition to his hay. If a horse should be fed a generous amount of oats and not put to work he'll get so full of pep that he will kick his stall apart. He literally "feels his oats." It's sort of like putting high test gas into a model "T" Ford.

I remember helping Jim Liberty build our first stable. Across the width of each stall, in the front we built a trough about four feet high and two feet in depth at the top and tapering to one foot in depth at the bottom. Thus it was I learned for the first time in my life what a manger is. The manger is filled with hay so that a horse standing in his stall can


LAST CHANCE SALO
FRONTIER TOWN
WESTERN OUTFITTE
SADDLE SHOP

We use lots of horses on our stage line which runs more stages than any other line in the U.S.A. The driver of the first stage coach is seventy six year old Lester Decker. There's more about Lester on page 91 in the chapter about the *many old timers working* at Frontier Town.

WESTERN OUTFITTERS

Our Seventh Cavalry uses lots of horses.

munch on hay at his leisure. On top of the manger against the right wall we built a box out of planking about eighteen inches wide and two feet deep and twelve inches high. This was the oat box. So that when a horse is fed the manger is filled with hay and oats are put into the grain box, the amount of oats depending on how hard the horse is working. Needless to say the horse always devours his "dessert" first and when he has licked up every morsel he goes to work on his hay. As I have filled our mangers with hay I often think of how our Lord at his birth was placed on the hay in the manger. What a humble earthly beginning for Him who created the universe.

It seems to me that our horse stable, in the evening after our stagecoach horses have finished their day's work and eaten their oats and are quietly munching their hay, presents one of the most peaceful scenes I've known. I just love to stand and watch and listen to them. Frequently I have seen one of those two thousand pound animals bend his head low and slowly reach ahead with his hind foot with its enormous horseshoe nailed on to it and very gently scratch his ear.

If I should lift the cover of the grain bin every one of those horses begins to whinny gently as though to say, "Don't forget me, I'd like some more grain." Incidentally it is vitally important that we keep the grain bin carefully locked. If a horse should get loose during the night and into the grain he will eat until he gets sick. And if he should then drink water it would swell the grain and burst his stomach.

A horse has other language too if he should be separated out in the pasture from his mate he will whinny excitedly until they are reunited.

If he is annoyed he will whinny in a nervous way that lets you know he is unhappy. If he snorts and lays his ears back, get away from his hind end. He's just about to kick with both hind feet.

One must never approach a horse from the rear and lay a hand on him without first talking to him. If you should touch him without talking to him you are liable to startle him and he probably will respond by kicking you. Incidentally a horse can kick only straight back. However, an ox can kick not only straight back but out to the side as well.

One thing more a horse must have to remain healthy is salt. We buy this in blocks which we can put in his grain box. We also buy it in larger blocks which we place out in the fields.

HARNESS-FEED

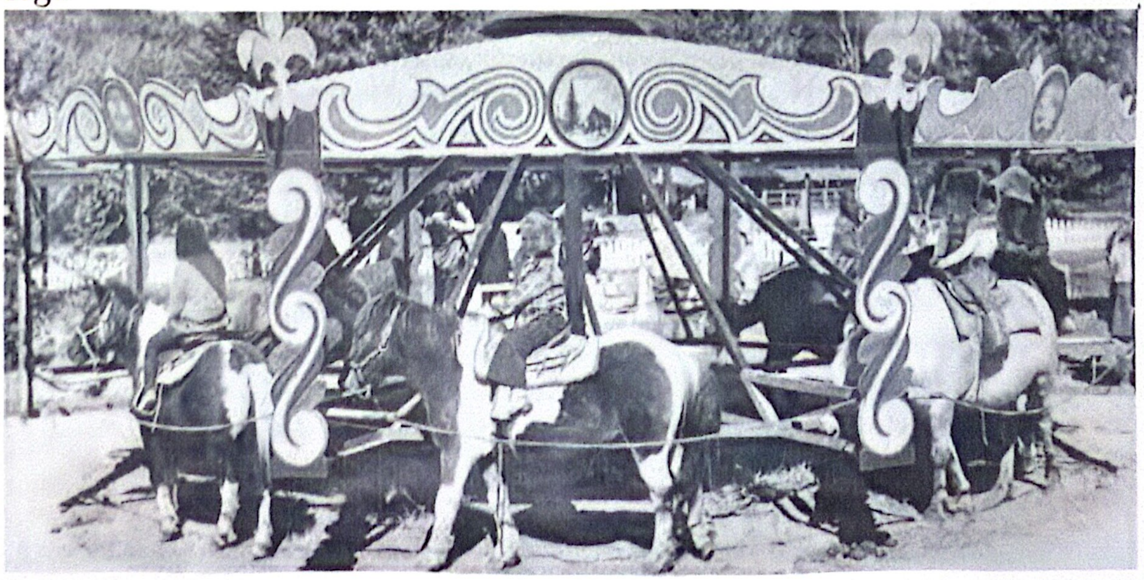
We use lots of horses in our corrals which provide horseback rides for Frontier Town visitors of all ages.

When the season is over we truck our horses about twenty-five miles up the road to our farm in Wadhams, N. Y. There we turn them loose to graze on our cut hay fields with blocks of salt in the fields and brooks of water for them to drink from. Since they are not working we do not grain our horses at this time. They continue to graze this way until the snow flies. Then all winter long our attendant who lives there on the farm, each morning carries hay out into the snow covered field breaks open the bales and spreads out the hay for the horses to eat. The attendant thus keeps a close watch on our horses. If he should notice that a horse is losing weight he takes him into the barn and looks him over. If an illness is evident he doctors the horse or if its something he can't handle he calls the vet. If no illness is evident he feeds the horse grain for a few days until he fattens out and turns him loose again with the others.

We're often asked, "Do you have to put blankets on your horses like our milkman used to do on cold winter days?" The answer is, "No." In the cities the milkman's horse was kept in a warm stable at night so he had to be protected when exposed to the cold weather the next day. Our horses are left out all the time. They are provided with sheds and shelters that they can run into if they want to, but very seldom will they use them. When left outdoors their coats become thicker and thicker. It must be that the insulation that God designed for a horse's coat is the most effective insulation in the world. I have seen our horses out in the snow covered fields quietly munching hay at 40 below zero with several inches of snow on their backs separated by just the thickness of their fur coats from the tremendous heat of their bodies and the snow not melting. Talk about design who said there is no God.

When we took our horse Bucksaw to the sports show at Madison Square Garden we took him off the frigid fields and he, of course, was kept indoors in the Garden for a week. Surprisingly he did not become overheated, but by the end of the week the thick down of very fine wool in his coat began to loosen. We were concerned. "What happens now when we take him back to the cold north country and turn him out with the others?" We needn't have worried. We turned him out in the cold and watched him very carefully within a few days that loose wool had tightened up and his coat was as sound as that of any other horse in the herd.

I've often wondered why the horses feet do not freeze buried as they are in the snow in those frigid temperatures. I remember how careful we were at first to open our watering holes in the ice on the river so that the horses could reach the water with their mouths while keeping their feet out of the icy water. Imagine our surprise when we brought them to the river to drink to see those horses walk right into the river into the icy water right up to their knees and quietly stand there until they had drunk all they wanted and then leisurely turn and splash there way back to the snow covered land with ice forming on their feet fetlocks and legs.



We use real horses to power our rides.

## WE HEAL A HORSE WITH A BROKEN LEG

It's generally believed that when a horse breaks his leg he must be destroyed. We proved that this is not necessarily so. One fall, one of our riding horses broke his right fore leg between his hoof and his knee. We were closed for the season so we brought him down to one of the chutes in the rodeo area and rigged a wide fabric band from one side of the chute under the horse's body behind his fore legs up to the other side of the chute so that while his hind feet were on the ground his fore feet were off the ground. We then called a vet who came and set the leg and put it in a plaster cast. Of course, the horse had to have careful nursing. He had to be fed and watered and manure removed. Occasionally we would let him down to stand on his three good legs. In two and a half months the leg had healed and the horse was walking on four legs, stiffly at first but gradually the leg was worked in so that the horse's gait was normal. I have never heard of anyone else ever successfully treating a broken leg.

## ROUNDING UP WILD BRAHMA BULLS IN THE WOODS OF THE ADIRONDACKS

We buy horses, Brahma bulls and other rodeo stock from a man named Howard Harris who owns a big cattle ranch and auction sales center at the south end of the state of New Jersey. He has a large rodeo area on his premises where he puts on rodeos every Saturday night during the summer and he has a traveling rodeo which he takes all over the northeast including Madison Square Garden in New York City.

On one occasion since all our hands were busy I decided to take our big horse van down to Howard's place and pick up a load of stock. I had always been under the impression that Howard, who had inherited this business from his father, had been handed this ranch on a silver platter and that he wasn't too much of a horseman. How wrong I was. I was really impressed when I saw Howard riding right among those Brahma bulls cutting out the stock I had selected. It was quickly evident that this boy was an expert. Incidentally I discovered that Howard had a couple of buffalo on hand so I picked them up also. Soon I was heading up the road with a full load of rodeo bucking horses, Brahma bulls, buffalo, roping calfs and dogging steers. Now, it's a four hundred mile trip from Harris' to Frontier Town so it was important to deliver and unload those animals as soon as possible. All went well until on the New York State Thruway near Kingston one of the dual wheels on the right hand side cracked and blew out the tire and tube. I managed to limp into a gas station about five o'clock in the evening but was unable to find a replacement for the broken wheel. So I called Frontier Town and told them to bring down a wheel from one of our other trucks. I then faced the problem of feeding and watering the stock in the truck. There was no platform or ramp where I could unload them and there was no way to get the hay and water in to feed the animals. I finally solved the problem by borrowing a ladder and hand saw and sawing three openings along each side of the big body through which I could feed the hay and deliver water to each of the animals. It was a long tough job but each one of those animals was properly taken care of. The new wheel arrived about

2:00 A.M. in the morning and by 3:00 A.M. we once more headed up the road to Frontier Town. We arrived at about 8:00 A.M. and unloaded in the arena with all the animals in good shape.

The next day three of those Brahma bulls escaped across the river and into the woods. We immediately sent out some of our cowboys who, although they searched for two days, were unable to round up those Brahma bulls. The result was that those Brahmas spent the entire summer in the woods on the other side of the river. From time to time new rodeo hands would come in who, upon hearing about the escaped bulls, would tell us they could round them up for us. Of course, we gladly accepted their offers but rounding up Brahma bulls in the Adirondack woods is different from rounding up cattle on the western range as these cowboys were used to doing. Some of our employees who went along to lend a hand reported that instead of rounding up the bulls, those Brahmas, which had become more wild with each passing day, rounded up the cowboys and sent them fleeing for their lives up the trees.

Mr. Harris generally winds up his rodeo circuit in Vermont not far from Frontier Town just after Frontier Town closes up for the season and since he has spare truck capacity, he stops at Frontier Town and picks up any stock we wish to return to him and thus saves us the trouble of trucking them back to his ranch in south Jersey. On this occasion he stopped by to pick up the Brahmas and some other stock. I explained to Howard that the bulls were gone and we would pay for them. That we had had experts trying to round them up but it was impossible to do so. He brushed aside my objections and said, "Just tell me where they are and I will go get them." I thought that was a pretty presumptious statement but it so happened that the day before a couple of surveyors who were laying out the new Interstate, had come into our restaurant wide eyed and told about these three monsters they had seen across the river in the woods. I told Harris the location they had given and he and his helper went out on horseback to round up the Brahmas. We sent along our horse van and two riders to give them a hand. Our riders reported that Harris found the Brahmas just about where the surveyors had indicated. In about twenty minutes Howard had lassoed the first of the Brahmas by both of his front feet. This is known in rodeo jargon as "forefooting." In a few more minutes Harris had lassoed both of the hind feet and down went that Brahma bull. Harris hitched a rope to the horn of his saddle and in a few minutes had skidded that Brahma across a shallow portion of the river and right up the ramp into our truck. He repeated that performance with the other two Brahmas so that within two and one-half hours of the time he left, our truck pulled into our rodeo area and unloaded those three Brahma bulls who had spent the entire summer in the woods across the river from Frontier Town. It was a display of cattle handling I have never seen equalled and all of our Western cowboys were duly impressed with this Eastern cowboy. Harris tried to load these animals on to his truck but they were so excited that they lay down and would not move. He said to me, "Art, I can drag them on board but I want them on their feet when they go down the road and if I persist in this, in the nervous state in which they are, they will probably die. So we will just let them quiet down for the night and they will load OK in

Our visitors enjoy the pigs, cows, sheep, goats, oxen, rabbits, chickens and the other farm animals in our barnyard. This photo shows one of our employees feeding a duck.

this morning." So we put Howard and his crew up at the motel and sure enough the next morning the Brahmas had quieted down and they loaded very easily. By 6:00 A.M. Howard had them on board and was on his way down the road.

## OTHER ANIMALS

In addition to our horses, we have our farm animals—pigs, cows, sheep, goats, oxen, rabbits, ducks, chickens and other farm animals on display in our barn yard.

In addition to our horses and farm animals, we have a beautiful deer park where our visitors can walk right in among our deer and even feed them. Although we see lots of whitetail deer in the woods around us, they are protected by the Conservation Department and we are not allowed to capture them. However, the hunting of whitetail deer is permitted in the hunting season.

No other attraction in the Adirondacks has whitetail deer on display. We have these whitetail deer because some years ago I was fortunate enough to hear of a man in one of the Middle Atlantic states who had some baby whitetail deer for sale. I immediately climbed into the plane and flew down and bought three female and two male baby whitetails. I also bought from him ducks, guinea hens, coons and assorted other animals. The plane was so loaded I scarcely had room to squeeze into the pilot's seat. I felt like Noah in his Ark. The man said you will have to bottle feed these deer and give them very tender loving care or they will die. This was in the fall of the year and we had closed for the season.

Matoaka, Swift Eagle's daughter, feeds a whitetail fawn in our deer park. Frontier Town is the only tourist attraction in the Adirondacks that has whitetail deer on display and visitors are permitted to walk right in among them.

When I told my mother about the special care that the deer required, she insisted that we keep them right in the apartment with us so that she could take care of them. We built a plywood pen in one corner of our kitchen and my mother bottle fed those deer and took such good care of them that we did not lose even one. They had grown big enough to put them on display the following spring and two years later all of the females produced twins. I don't think there is anything in the world that is as beautiful as a baby fawn. To see them struggle to their feet right after they are born and immediately begin to walk is a wonder to behold.

### BEAVER IN THE BATHTUB

Another fall we were given a beaver and we kept him in the apartment over the winter. Each day I had to bring in a supply of poplar twigs (Adirondackers call poplar "popel"). The beaver cleaned the bark off those twigs just as though it had been done with a knife. That is the only food he ate and he seemed to thrive on it. Each evening we partially filled the bathtub with water. The beaver spent his nights in the bathtub but with dawn's early light, he could be heard dragging his flat tail across the floor to my closet where he slept the day away. He was no trouble at all except that he did eat a hole in the imitation tile above the tub.

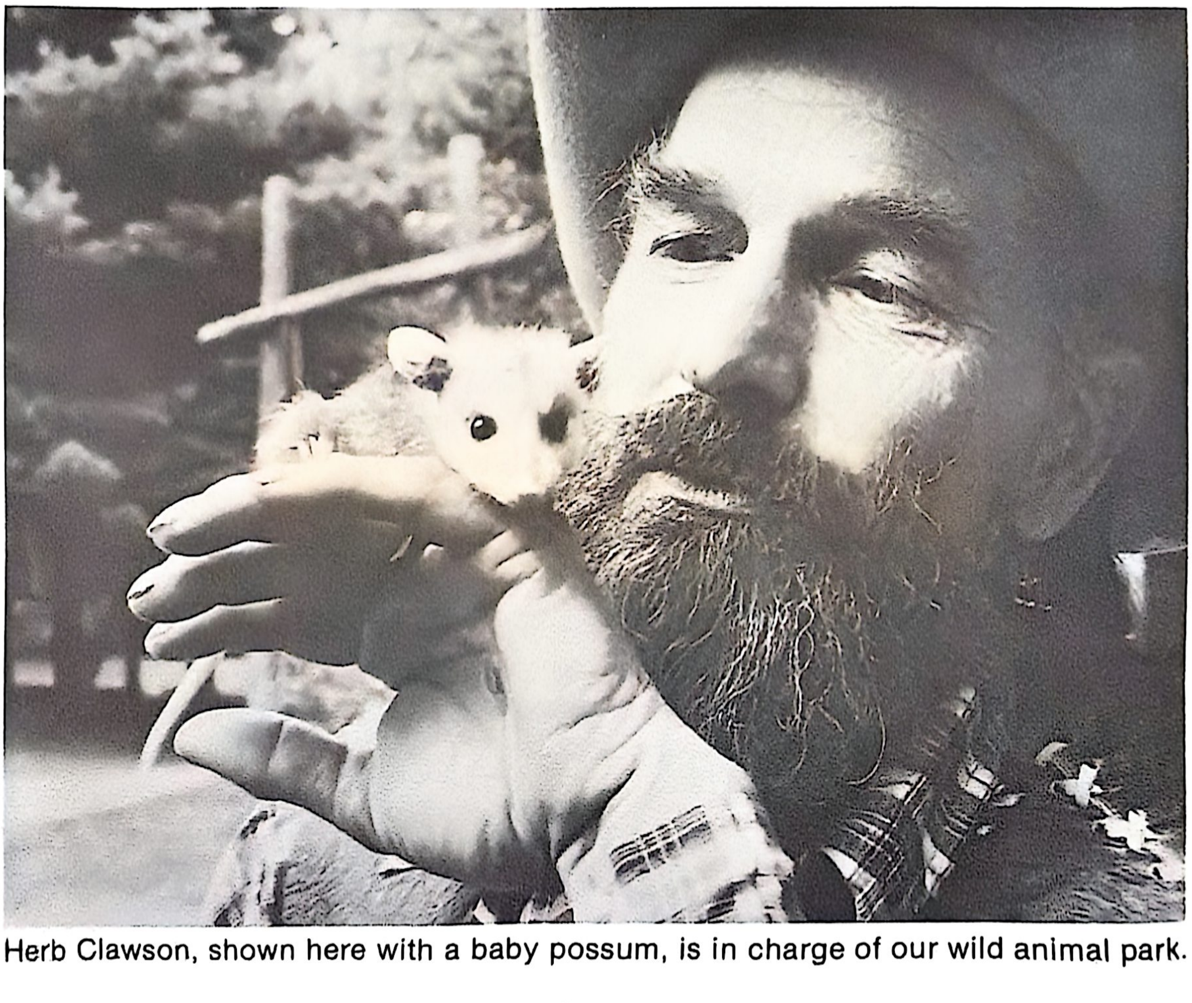
## MONKEY BUSINESS

One morning we found a monkey tied to our front door. Attached to his collar was a note.

"We know that you take good care of your animals and we know that your visitors will love Cuddles." This was after we had closed for the season so we had to take care of Cuddles over the winter. Well, Cuddles climbed over everything in the apartment. But my mother loved animals and was glad to take care of the monkey, too. The following season one of our employees walked around Frontier Town with Cuddles on his shoulder.

## OUR OTTERS

We have lots of otter in the ponds around us but they also are protected animals and we had to buy a pair of otter from Florida and have them shipped up by air to us. We put them in a new cage we had built and the next morning we found that they had escaped and they had been killed out on the highway. These otters cost us $500 apiece. We built the next cage out of concrete and our new otters were kept safe and comfortable with a private pool for them to swim in.



Herb Clawson, shown here with a baby possum, is in charge of our wild animal park.

## DANGEROUS ELK

For several years we had a pair of elk. These beautiful animals look like deer but are much larger. The female is always gentle and has no horns just as female deer have no horns. The male had a span of horns more than six feet across and as with male deer, each spring the old antlers drop off and a new set begins to grow. While the horns are growing, they are soft and have a velvet-like cover and are said to be "in the velvet." In the late fall when the horns are fully grown, the velvet comes off and the horns get very hard. This is the mating season and at this time the male becomes belligerent and dangerous. Each fall our male elk seemed to become more belligerent and dangerous than the year before. I have been told that a healthy male elk needs at least six female elk in his harem. We had only one and he almost killed her. When she was not in the mood for more loving, he attacked her with his horns.

He even tried to attack people. We heard that if we sawed his horns off, we would take the ginger out of him and he would quiet down, so we decided to saw his horns off. We got a dart gun and loaded one of the darts with knock-out medicine. The dosage, we were told, depended upon the weight of the animal. We estimated his weight to be 600 pounds and fired the dart. He didn't even blink. Several days later, having increased the dosage gradually each day, we had administered a dose for an animal weighing 1,500 pounds. He finally went down. Six of us climbed over the fence and were in the cage in a flash with heavy ropes and a bone saw. We tried sawing on those horns of his but the saw didn't even make a mark. We had attached several of those heavy ropes to his horns, preparing to tie him to a tree while we sawed the horns off but in about two minutes when that six foot spread of antlers began to thrash around, we gave up the idea in a hurry and scrambled back over the fence. A bit later, we tried shooting those horns off with a powerful 30-06 rifle. We hit the horns all right and knocked Mr. Elk flat on his side, but we didn't even dent the horns. For the rest of the winter and until his horns fell off the following spring, that elk walked around his pen, festooned with those heavy ropes. The following fall, when he came out of the velvet, we found him more mean and ugly than ever and because we were afraid that he might escape and attack someone, we had no choice but to get rid of him.

## HUNGRY GOATS

One year we decided that it would be a good idea to have a few goats wandering around Frontier Town. These were very gentle goats and we thought people would enjoy taking pictures of their youngsters petting them or feeding them. This seemed to work out very well and it pleased a lot of our guests. However, it developed that these goats had an appetite for yard goods and sometimes while the ladies stood watching the stagecoach outlaw getting his just desserts in the ducking stool, the goats would stand alongside quietly and unobtrusively eating holes in their dresses. This got to be pretty expensive and we finally had to confine our goats to the barn yard.

## OUR FRONTIER TOWN TURKEY

Another summer we turned a big turkey loose in Frontier Town. He was quite a character. He wandered around town all day long in a most friendly fashion and people liked to feed him and take his picture. As soon as we closed for the day and the crowds started to leave, that turkey climbed up on top of the bear cage and roosted there for the night. The next day, as soon as our visitors began to arrive, he came down and took up his duties as roving ambassador of good will. However, he loved hot dogs and if someone holding a hot dog should carelessly drop a hand to his side, that turkey would snatch the hot dog from between the halves of the roll so neatly that it wasn't missed until our guest took the next bite. Since this did not engender a lot of good will, we decided it would be best to confine Mr. Turkey to the barn yard also.

## BEARS

Our bears are perhaps our most interesting animals. We have lots of black bears in the woods around us. One evening after we had closed, I was doing some repairs on the train when I saw a mother bear and two cubs stroll right down the main street of Prairie Junction.

However, bears are also protected by law and we are not allowed to capture them so we bought a pair of black bears from a man who was licensed to raise them. We named them Sampson and Delilah.

Our bears were just a few months old and weighed about 30 pounds apiece when we bought them. Within two years, they weighed about 400 pounds.

We found that with the onset of cold weather in the late fall, their appetites diminished and what food they did eat came through them increasingly undigested and soon they stopped eating and drinking completely. We threw a generous supply of hay into their cage which they dragged over to the dens which we had provided in the hillside for each of them. They shaped that hay into a comfortable nest in which they spent the winter. It is incorrect to say that a bear hibernates. It is more accurate to say that a bear dorminates. A true hibernater can be very roughly handled without being awakened. But a bear can be aroused at any time during his dormant stage.

On occasion, in the dead of winter, when we need pictures of our bears, we reach into their dens with long poles and prod them until they sluggishly walk out into the snow where we can photograph them. They will even lick honey or other sweets we might offer them, but only half-heartedly. When we are through with our picture taking, they amble slowly back into their hay-lined dens and settle down for the rest of the winter. Sometimes on particularly warm winter days, they will be found with their eyes open and their chins resting on the sills of the den, observing the wintery world outside of their cage.

In the spring, even before the bears come out, we listen anxiously for the sound that indicates that there has been an increase in our bear family, for a baby bear nurses with loud sound effects. When we hear them, there's rejoicing in Frontier Town. Everybody loves baby bear cubs. After the first indication that a cub has been born, we keep on the alert for the first sight of those tiny balls of fur darting in and out of the den. Then finally comes a day when the whole family comes out for all to see. You can imagine our delight on learning that our first bears at the age of two years had presented us with three cubs. Each time since they have had but one. Most people are amazed to learn that those bears of ours, which grew to a standing height of over eight feet, with a weight of over 800 pounds, weighed just one pound when they were born.

Gradually, in the spring, as the warm weather comes on, our bears begin to eat and soon they are consuming enormous quantities of food. Incidentally, a bear eats everything we humans eat, meat, vegetables, fruit and, of course, sweets. Fortunately, we have a large resturant and a large cafeteria, the leftover food from which keep our bears well fed.

As mentioned above, our original Sampson and Delilah grew to enormous size and lived to be 20 years of age.

## HOW TO CORRAL AN 800 POUND BEAR

During the 25 years that Frontier Town has been open, it has been my all too frequent, unpleasant experience to be awakened in the middle of the night and apprised of the fact that some or all of our herd of 100 horses are out on the highway and heading in the general direction of New York City or Montreal. Somehow we have always managed to wake up enough cowboys to round up the horses and herd them back through the gate which some employee had failed to properly secure.

We have a much more difficult time when the Brahma bulls, which we use in our Frontier Town rodeos decide to go out for a stroll. You see, wild bulls do not lead like horses.

However, we found ourselves confronted one evening a few years ago with the most formidable problem of this type we had ever faced. It was just after we had closed for the day that I received the word: "Delilah is out." Sampson and Delilah had been greeting Frontier Town visitors for many years and they were enormous. Some one cleaning the cage had failed to fasten the catch and Delilah had escaped. We soon found her in a strawberry patch at the end of town. We approached her very cautiously and since she didn't seem to be in a dangerous mood, a few of our boys went into the brush behind her and she came out into the clearing. Then suddenly she darted back into the brush and up the steep bank to the parking lot.

I sent for a gun, a pail of honey, a pitchfork and a thick rope. When we went around to the parking lot, we found Delilah standing quietly on the grass at the edge of the lot, gazing about her.

Holding the pail of honey before me, I warily approached this monstrous bear, inviting her to have a taste. She accepted the invitation and started to come my way. As that big bear approached me, I had second thoughts and put the pail down and backed off. Delilah came up to the pail, took a mouthful of honey, raised her head and looked around contentedly as she licked her chops. As I began to again move towards the pail, the bear backed off 50 feet to the edge of the parking lot and stopped.

Suddenly I had a brilliant idea! I'll make a large slip noose at the end of my rope, lay it on the ground, stand the pail of honey in the middle of that big lasso and back off the 20 foot length of the rope. When

Delilah comes back and puts her head into the pail for another mouthful of honey, I'll just give that rope a flip and presto! I've captured my bear.

Well, it worked—too well. When I began to raise my arm in preparation for twitching that rope, Delilah, who was on the alert for trouble, took notice and defensively raised her fore feet just as the rope lifted off the ground. The rope went over her head, past her fore legs and tightened around her body. Instantly, that bear became a ferocious, raging monster as she clawed at the rope in a desperate attempt to free herself. I'll admit that I was thoroughly frightened.

Of course, this whole idea was stupid. What was there to stop that big bear from charging down the 20 feet of rope at me. Had she decided to attack instead of concentrating on getting out of the noose, I would have been in big trouble. Well, it has been my experience over the years that the Lord frequently protects me from my own stupidity.

Fortunately, in about one minute Delilah's frantic efforts succeeded in freeing her from the rope, my end of which I had dropped on the ground. Instantly, she quieted down and once again backed off on to the grass at the edge of the parking lot.

But what to do? As I was contemplating this, Delilah decided to see what the rest of the world looked like and passing about 100 feet on my left, she ran across the parking lot to the road leading to Route 9, the New York-Montreal Highway. Quickly I sent a car full of our boys around by a private road through the woods to get to the highway intersection before Delilah did and to turn her around.

Suddenly, a car full of jolly, noisy French Canadians came swinging off the highway on to Delilah's road. During Frontier Town's 25 years, we have had millions of our French Canadian neighbors visit us. In fact, we have so many that our sales people and even our signs have to be bilingual. I can say from personal experience that no people I have ever known seem to enjoy an outing like our French Canadian friends. It seems that they are all extroverts.

When this car full of Frenchmen saw that enromous black bear coming right down the middle of the road at them, they suddenly became a lot noisier but a lot less jolly. Panic ensued. That car came to a screeching halt, spun its wheels in a wild 180 degree turn and disappeared up the main highway in the direction of Montreal—real fast.

Meanwhile, back at the pass—our lads arrived at the main highway intersection just in time. They cautiously climbed out of the car, fanned out across the road, and slowly advanced towards Delilah. The driver kept up with them with the doors open just in case—.

We all breathed a sigh of relief when Delilah turned around and headed down the middle of the road in the direction of our office. I joined those bear herders as they passed the spot in the parking lot where I was standing and we all followed that big bear down the road at a respectable distance until she came to a point opposite to our office on the left side of the road. Suddenly, before we realized what was happening, she darted 30 feet to her left and stopped in the open doorway, straddling the threshhold. I told everyone to back off. You see, my

Ed Ovensen poses with Delilah in the lobby of our "A" frame cafeteria and gift shop next to our airport at exit 29 of interstate 87, the Adirondack Northway. This is the bear which escaped and was led back into her cage by Ed using nothing but a bucket of honey and some soft talk.

mother lived with me in that apartment above the office and she was there at that time.

Now anyone who knows bears, stands in awe of their tremendous power. My friend, Jim Liberty, an experienced Adirondack hunter, tells me that he has seen an aroused bear smaller than Delilah, walk up to a pine tree and "tear out chunks as big as I can cut with my ax." All of us realized that my mother was in grave danger. We had no way to get to her and she had no way to get out because that doorway in which Delilah was standing was the only entrance to the apartment. If that bear climbed those stairs and acted up as she had just a short time before with me, she could have torn that apartment apart in minutes. We all remained perfectly quiet and prayed. After what seemed like an eternity, Delilah stood on her hind feet, pivoted around, headed across the road, across the parking lot, and down the hill into Frontier Town. We went around by road and found her in a clearing a couple of hundred feet from the edge of the woods. As she caught sight of us, Delilah left the clearing, climbed the hillside, sat down on a large low pine stump and calmly observed us frustrated would-be captors.

It was beginning to get dark when Ed Ovensen, said, "Give me that pail of honey and everyone get out of here." So we all climbed up the hill to the edge of the parking lot where we could have an unobstructed view and settled down to watch. Ed sat down in the clearing with the pail of honey beside him, about 200 feet from Delilah's stump. He quietly began to call, "Come on, Delilah, come on, Delilah," just like he calls his dog. In about five minutes, we saw Delilah step off that stump, then there she was heading across the clearing for Ed and his pail of honey. Now I've always known that Ed has nerves of steel. But this was too much.

As she approached, he did not even stand up, evidently thinking that if he did so, she might have backed off. We all knew that sitting there on the ground, he was in a very dangerous position, had that bear, towering above him, decided to act up. Ed waited until Delilah had taken a mouthful of honey and lifted her head to lick her chops. Then, talking to her the whole time, he very quietly stood to his feet, picked up the pail of honey and began to stroll towards the bear cage with the bear walking alongside, dipping occasionally for another mouthful of honey. They had covered about half the distance to the cage when with a roar and rattle, a neighbor suddenly swung into the clearing in his old truck. Delilah promptly ran back and again sat down on the stump. After profuse apologies, our good neighbor and his truck left and once again Ed took the seat on the ground alongside his pail of honey in the same spot and repeated the same performance. Soon Ed and Delilah were once again strolling towards the cage. When Ed reached the cage door, he stopped, the bucket of honey stopped and the bear stopped. Somehow he just couldn't find the right words to persuade Delilah to precede him into the cage. We saw him scratch his head and we could read his mind: "Do I dare step inside this cage with this monster? Well, I guess there's no other way. Come on, Delilah." He shrugged his shoulders and stepped through the doorway, which was too narrow for them to enter side by side, holding the bucket behind him. Delilah followed. Ed walked across the cage, poured the remaining honey on the floor and while Delilah was busy lapping up that honey, Ed stepped out and locked the door.

Ed is still here at Frontier Town. His office is located next to our cafeteria in the largest A-frame building in New York State, right at Exit 29 of the Adirondack Northway (I-87, the New York to Montreal Highway).

And Delilah is here, too. When she died a few years later, we had her mounted. She stands over eight feet tall in the lobby just outside of Ed's office. The taxidermist who did the mounting told me that with the exception of her mate, Sampson, she was the biggest black bear he had ever seen.

# Chapter Eight

## FRONTIER TOWN'S UNUSUAL EMPLOYEES

Here's an article from the N.Y. Sunday News (circulation 4,000,000) dated July 13, 1975 about the old timers working again at Frontier Town.

### BACK IN SADDLE AT FRONTIER TOWN

With its rodeos, carousels, Indian villages and a cast of characters impersonating wild west heroes like Custer, Wyatt Earp, Doc Holliday and Jesse James, Frontier Town in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State is the kind of place you hate to leave—and many don't. Especially senior citizens looking to get "back in the saddle" again with a job that can be as much fun as it is work.

Take, for example, Lester Decker, 76, a retired ex-farmer who was feeling "just next to being plumb useless" when he visited Frontier Town as a tourist a decade ago.

He took in the sights like the Kissing Bridge and the Iroquois Village in the multi-theme fun park at exit 29, Interstate Route 87, above Albany, about five hours from New York City.

As he settled back for a stage coach ride down the Dry Gulch Trail, he got to thinking he wouldn't mind driving a team of horses 'round·Frontier Town. It would be kind of like a fountain of youth, jobwise.

So he applied for a job and landed a slot as a stage coach driver and you can hear the enthusiasm in his voice as he clucks: "Gid-up there Maude, move along there Maisie."

Frontier Town is enthusiastic too because in Decker they landed a reliable man who is an expert around horses and has managed its fleet of 10 stage coaches with only minor accidents in the 10 years he's been on the job.

In fact, Decker is one of about 45 employees in their 60s and 70s out of 300 Frontier Town employees who spend the summer season working a variety of jobs.

They range from Joseph McStravick, 82, of Rockville Centre, L.I. who has spent the past eight years at the Frontier Town barber shop giving youngsters their first "shave," to Swift Eagle, a full-blooded Apache who has worked in movie westerns and spent the last 22 years at Frontier Town "educating the white man" about the true nature of his tribe.

The mournful wail of a nearby train steam whistle reminds you that you never know when it is the end of the line—which is why it is good to see a man like Earl O'Neil, 72, enjoying himself on the job pulling back the throttle of old No. 44, a train that has a "rendezvous" with the James gang.

Joseph McStravick gives this youngster his first shave in Frontier Town's Barber Shop.

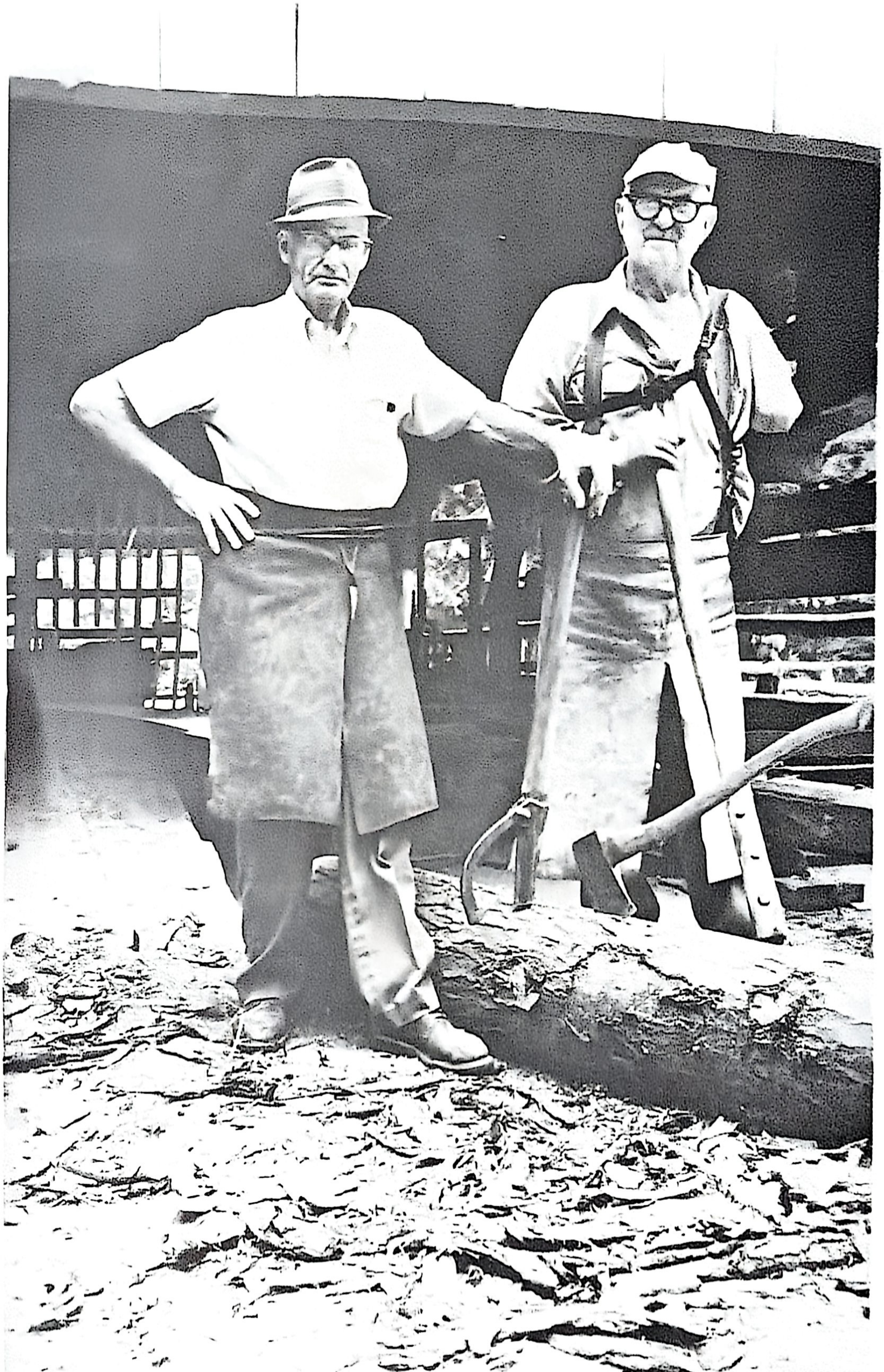
O'Neil has been chief engineer, oiler, fireman et al. on the wood and coal burning locomotive for 12 years. He never handled a steam engine before coming to Frontier Town but had laid down many miles of track in the mines of Republic Steel at Mineville, N.Y. He likes it better above ground and has come to know and love "Old Betsy" (as he calls the train) over the years.

"She is probably good enough for another 100 years and I aim to stay with her for a few more years myself," he says.

Not far from where Jay Tedford, 73, and Frank Moulton, 72, run the 100-year-old steam powered sawmill, you can find "probably" the oldest woman working in Frontier Town. Her name is Grace Hanneford and we say "probably" the oldest because a gentleman doesn't ask a woman her age.

But Grace came to Frontier Town in 1956 to entertain for a week in the main arena with her husband, Poodles, and her young daughter, Grace. They decided to stay. Poodles died in 1970 but young Gracie continued with the trained poodle act and Grace, the elder, turned her weaving hobby into a job at Frontier Town where she employs an early Dutch beam loom.

Lester Decker says, "Every trip is like a new experience because you never know what the kids or grown-ups will do. Just riding aboard a stage that sits you up eight foot in the air and rolls and bumps as it winds through the forest trail is quite a feeling, 'specially to them city



Many of our "senior citizens" enjoy working again at some craft they worked at prior to retirement. Shown here are Frank Moulton 73 (left) and Jay Tedford 74 who operate the 100 year old steam-powered sawmill which we found in Pottersville and moved to Frontier Town in 1971. Both of these men had worked in sawmill most of their lives and love being back in harness again.

Visitors enjoy an ox cart ride past our water powered grist mill which is operated by Paul Despres a seventy two year old French Canadian shown in the insert. In a ceremony in August 1975, presided over by Joseph Horan, Director of Tourism of New York State Commerce Department, the mill was dedicated to and named after Oliver Evans, a master millwright who ranks in stature in water power as Robert Fulton did in steam power. After many years of research and visits to other mills in the United States, the staff of Frontier Town was able to create an authentic structure and machinery components in the exact manner of mills built to Oliver Evans' specifications during the American Revolutionary War period. Mr. Evans, who was the foremost millwright of his time (1755-1819), designed colonial mills that operated with such efficiency that American millers could grind and ship it to England at prices competitive with the product made by English mills.

folks, but when the outlaws pop out from behind a tree and yell, 'Up with your hands and throw down the gold,' there's the wildest mixture of laughing and crying that you could ever imagine."

Lester recalls many of these experiences but likes to tell about a letter from a happy and thankful mother that he was asked to pass on to the outlaw with the blue bandanna. This is how it was reported in Reader's Digest.

Employee Gary Fleming, under the direction of Mack Andersen, puts the finishing touches on the wooden master gear of the grist mill. The timbers for our grist mill were produced by our 100 year old steam sawmill.

"Excerpt from a letter by an appreciative visitor to Frontier Town, a tourist attraction in the Adirondack Mountains of New York State: 'And a special word of thanks to the outlaw with the blue bandanna who held up our stagecoach. He accomplished in an instant what we had failed to achieve in years. As he was searching the stage for the gold shipment, his gaze chanced to rest on our thumb-sucking five-year-old daughter. And he growled, "Take that thumb out of your mouth and don't you ever do that again." She hasn't.' "

## SAW MILL

Here's an article 'that appeared in the Glens Falls Times in 1970 about our steam sawmill run by Jay Tedford and Frank Moulton who are old timers who have spent most of their lives working in sawmills. They tell us that our antique sawmill is one of the smoothest running mills they have ever operated.

The timbers for our grist mill were sawed on this old sawmill.

## STEAM-POWERED ADIRONDACK MOUNTAIN SAWMILL LIVES ON

Pottersville, N.Y.—Piece by carefully marked piece, a relic of the great days of Adirondack Mt. lumbering, a genuine old time steam-powered sawmill has been moved from its original location in Pottersville and rebuilt exactly as it was at Frontier Town, North Hudson, N.Y. Authenticity of detail was maintained because the removal and rebuilding was done under the loving supervision of Frost Phelps, who had worked in the sawmill from the age of 10 right up til the time it was sold to Frontier Town in 1969. Now 86 years old, he recalls with spry recollection, the days of the sawmill when it was operated by his father.

Jay Tedford explains the workings of the 100 year old steam engine in the sawmill.

WOOoooeee. . . . The sound of the steam whistle from the sawmill broke the stillness of this little Adirondack village and re-echoed among the surrounding mountains. It was a happy sound because it was sounding the noon hour. Time for a break from the long morning labors of the towns-people in Pottersville, but best of all it was time for school to be out. The little two-room school house was located on a rise just across the road from the sawmill and some of the boys (and girls) who had a seat near a window would have one eye glued on the whistle. They could see the steam rise from the whistle just a fraction of a second before the sound reached them and the books could be put away that much faster.

Some of the school children would open their lunch buckets in school, others would head for their homes in town, a few lucky ones would head down the hill to the sawmill. Forrest Jones was one of the fortunate kids—his father was sawyer at the mill. They would squeeze into the boiler room with the men and listen with awe to the tales of the mountains.

Bishop (Bish) Phelps, who operated the sawmill, was head story teller. He came by it natural because his father was "Old Mountain Phelps", already legend, but most famous and remembered by the boys because he did not believe in washing or as he said, "Etarnal Sozzlin" in soap and water. Bish enjoyed repeating one story and everyone enjoyed hearing it.

It was about his operation. He had been tortured for years with a painful corn on one of his toes, so one day, losing all his patience, he pulled off his boot and sock, placed his foot up on the anvil, and with a sure and steady blow with a hammer against the chisel, removed the corn . . . toe . . . and all. The boys always demanded to see the proof and Bish always enjoyed showing it off.

Bishop's two sons, Mott and Frost began work in the sawmill when they were big enough to throw the slab into the wood-burning boilers. One of their most important jobs was during the hot dry part in the summer. They would be stationed on the roof with buckets of water to douse sparks from the Fire-Box. They were taught everything there was to learn about running a sawmill and took over operation of the mill in the late 20's before their father died.

Frost Phelps 83 of Pottersville, N.Y. who began working in this sawmill at the age of 10 demonstrates its operation to Senator Ron Stafford who was on hand for the dedication when the mill was put into operation at Frontier Town.

During the winter the trees were cut down and the logs hauled into Pottersville on huge horse-drawn sleds. In those days they did not have to sand roads. The sawmill was situated at the bottom of a steep hill and the logs were dumped off at the top and rolled down the hill. In the early spring the boilers were fired up and sawing logs began in earnest. Logs had to be sawed up before the hot summer weather came or they would green mold. During most of the summer the lumber which had been cut the previous year would be run through the planer. The mill operated on a commercial basis until Mott died in 1961.

Thanks to the foresight of Frontier Town, another piece of early American industry has been preserved for posterity and is back in operation for thousands of visitors to see. Frost says that it cuts a board as true as it did in the old mill. The old steam whistle sounds the beginning of the day at Frontier Town. Live steam turns the old engine, the big wooden pulleys and wide belts whirrrrr . . . a huge log is run up on the carriage into the blade . . . and another segment of America's adventurous history, an important one, is brought back to life at Frontier Town.

## IN ADDITION TO THE ADIRONDACK NATIVES, FRONTIER TOWN HAS BROUGHT SOME VERY UNUSUAL PEOPLE TO THE ADIRONDACKS

### SWIFT EAGLE

Swift Eagle, whose father was Apache and whose mother was from the Teawa Tribe in San Domingo, New Mexico, has been with Frontier Town since 1954. He does not know how old he is but he does remember being sent to school shortly after New Mexico was admitted to the Union in 1912, wearing a cavalry uniform left over from the Civil War and many sizes too large for him. He thinks that he might have been ten years old at the time. They kept him on for several years after graduation to be in charge of the orchestra. He has always played beautiful music on his home made Indian flute at his pow-wows in the Indian Village at Frontier Town.

In the fall of 1976 he showed me a letter from the Boston Symphony Orchestra, asking him to be their guest soloist with his Indian flute. After that performance, he was guest soloist with his flute with the N. Y. Philharmonic at Lincoln Center. He was well paid for these appearances.

After school, because of his skill at interpretive dancing and his flair for story telling, he was chosen by the elders of the tribe to travel into the land of the white man to show the culture of their tribe. One of his appearances was at the Coconut Grove in Hollywood, where he met and became good friends with Jim Thorpe, the Olympic decathlon winner. Jim introduced him to a Hollywood producer and lo and behold Swift Eagle wound up acting in some of the typical westerns depicting the Indian as a blood thirsty killer. Smoke signals of wrath reached him from the elders of his tribe, calling him back for a pow-wow where he was told that instead of portraying a lie, he should be telling the white man the true nature of their peace-loving tribe. Swift Eagle admitted that he was at fault and was subsequently chosen to travel throughout the land with the mission to "educate" the white man. His one man mission took him all over the United States and Canada to schools, Rotary Clubs, et cetera, and one day in 1954 he came to Frontier Town and gave his message in song and dance. Everyone enjoyed his talent and the truth of his message so much that we asked him to stay. He's happy here and says, "At Frontier Town the people come to me instead of me having to travel all over the land."

Swift Eagle speaks twelve Indian dialects and for several years he and I were paid to put on school assembly programs in New York City and throughout the northeast in which, by means of dialogue, I asked him questions. He described to the school kids what life was like for a boy growing up in his Indian village of San Domingo, New Mexico. He also gave demonstrations of various Indian languages and of sign language. He pointed out, "There are many more than the twelve Indian languages that I know but most Indians, regardless of what tribe they are from, even though they can't understand each other's language, they can understand each other through sign language."

I traveled with Swift Eagle on many occasions to New York City for appearances by him on various TV programs including Johnny Carson's Who Do You Trust on ABC. Swift Eagle loves to travel; that is, when I feed him properly. But, if his stomach is empty, he is one unhappy Indian.

He has a good sense of humor. One day while flying to New York, as we were passing some fleecy clouds, he semed to study each cloud as we went by and would make the comment, "Nope, not there." Finally, I asked him what this was all about. He said with a smile, "I'm looking for Sittin' Bull and I expect to find him on one of these clouds."

In the fall of 1975 my wife and I visited Swift Eagle's home in San Domingo, Pueblo, New Mexico. We were warmly welcomed by his people and showered with gifts and expressions of appreciation for having provided Swift Eagle, their representative, an opportunity to reach the white populace with a better understanding of the red man. We were particularly impressed with the adobe houses and the outdoor baking ovens. And we were also impressed by the skill of Swift Eagle's people in turning out exquisite turquois jewelry in sterling silver mountings.

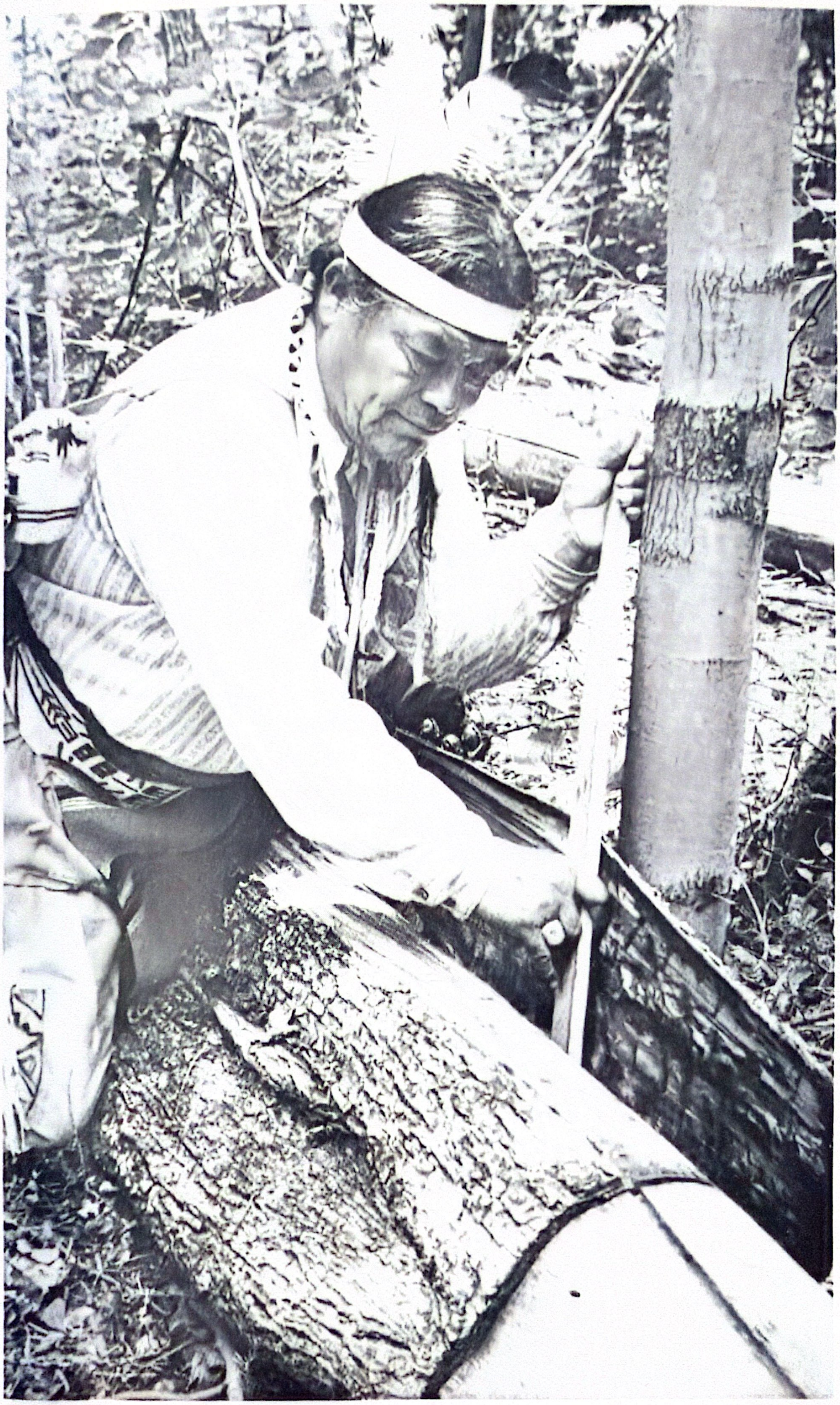
Swift Eagle's wife is Chee Chee Bird. She is of the Chickahomony Tribe of Virginia. That is the tribe that was associated with Captain John Smith. They had four children and their names are, in order of their ages, Singing Eagle, Dancing Eagle, Powhatan Eagle (after the Chief who was a friend of Captain John Smith) and Motoaka Eagle. Motoaka was Pocahontas' name. Pocahontas was a nickname. Swift Eagle met his wife at a church affair in New York City.

Swift Eagle is a most unusual Indian. He is an extrovert and loves people. To him, spreading his message of good will is the most important job in the world and people sense his sincerity as he holds his pow-wows three times a day in our Indian Village and all our visitors enjoy themselves immensely as they participate.

## RODEO PERFORMERS DICK CORY AND FAMILY

Among our performers, top billing at Frontier Town goes to Dick Cory, who is our town marshall, our arena director and the star of our rodeos.

Dick puts on a dazzling performance of trick and fancy roping and he thrills our audiences with his magnificent horse catches. He is one of the few ropers in the world who can maneuver the Mexican Meguey rope so that it springs up from the ground and catches all four legs of a running horse or, with his back turned, he can roll a loop in front of a horse timed perfectly to catch the running horse and rider. Dick makes it look very easy.



Our Indian Village is under the direction of Swift Eagle who has been with us since 1954. He is from the Indian village of San Domingo, New Mexico. His father was Apache and his mother was a Teawa. Swift Eagle speaks twelve Indian languages. In this photo he is peeling elm bark which he uses for covering the houses in our Indian village.

Top billing at Frontier Town goes to Dick Cory, who is our town marshal, our arena director and the star of our rodeos. Dick puts on a dazzling performance of trick and fancy roping and he thrills our audiences with his magnificent horse catches. He is one of the few ropers in the world who can maneuver the Mexican Meguey rope so that it springs up from the ground and catches all four legs of a running horse or, with his back turned, can roll a loop in front of a horse timed perfectly to catch the running horse and rider. Dick makes it look very easy. It is a delight to hear Dick sing his songs of the West. Often he is joined by his wife Lois (shown here) who also plays the guitar and sings. Lois too is a trick and fancy roping artist and she has one of the finest high schooled horse acts in the country.

Our rodeo audiences love the performances of Ringo, the beautiful highly trained paint horse belonging to Dick's wife, Lois.

Lois and their fifteen-year-old daughter, Shawna, join Dick in some of his trick and fancy roping routines.

Their teen-age son, Randy, who was the 1975 Florida State high school calf roping champion and who is in the lead for the Florida State high school all around rodeo cowboy championship, sharpens his skills at calf roping, bull dogging, bareback, saddle bronc and bull riding each summer in the Frontier Town rodeo.

The Corys have been at Frontier Town for the past sixteen seasons and we are extremely proud of them.

They spend their winters on their ranch in Florida.

## JOE EVANS—GLOBE TROTTING COWBOY

This article appeared in the Albany Times Union and many other newspapers.

Frontier Town, Adirondack Mt. Park, N.Y.—Joe Evans—cowboy: And at 62 is as rough-hide tough and lean a cowboy as he was at 32 when he rode wild broncs and bulls in a championship rodeo that toured Europe.

Joe rode his last bucking horse when he turned 50, but he still was plenty tall in the saddle, despite the many broken bones and other injuries sustained during his many years of rodeo. Astride his colorful Appaloosa, Charlie, he presents a commanding figure in the rodeo at Frontier Town in the Adirondack Mt. Park of New York State, where he has been head pick-up man since 1966.

Joe had what might be called a proper cowboy start in life. He was born in 1913 on Snake Creek, Dodge County, Montana. That same day, Joe's father figured he might as well get to know what a horse was all about, so he bundled him up and took him for his first ride around their pole cabin!

Joe had the adventure boyhood that most kids read about in history books or see something like on TV. First of all, there was no school! 'Course his mother taught him his reading, writing and 'rithmatic, and he did a lot of reading about the rest of the world during the long winter nights. And then there were horses, lots of them! Joe's father raised them on open range and shipped about 1,000 head each year. Joe got through all those glamorous jobs like cleaning the stable out, calving, branding, and riding herd under the stars during the trail-drives to the rail-head at Sunatra, Montana. He doesn't remember too much about the stars . . . he does remember the 35 below zero weather, the wind, the dust and the mud, but doesn't recall disliking it. It was a cowboy's life, and the job was there to be done.

When he was 13 he came east to Minnesota with a load of horses. They rode in the caboose and he recalls the good times he had watching a different part of the world go by. After the horses were sold, his father showed him around town. There were a lot of things to see, but what intrigued him most of all was seeing a street, and a paved one at that! Later everyone headed down to the rodeo to compete and show their skill at staying aboard a wild bucking bronc. Joe was big for his age, almost full grown, so his father again figured he was old enough to see what it

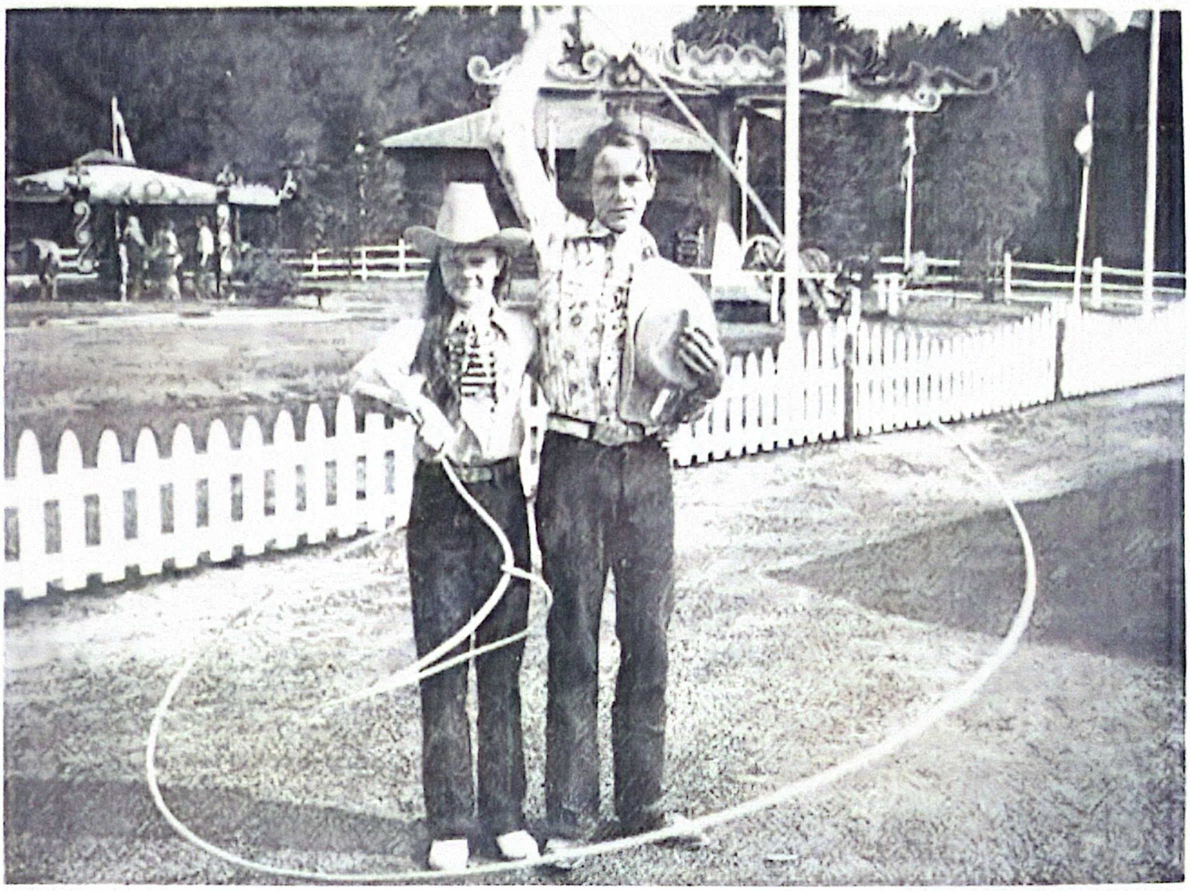
JOE EVANS

Joe Evans is a cowboy's cowboy. He was born on a ranch in Montana. From the time he was able to sit a saddle he worked at rounding up wild horses. At 17 he left home to travel the rodeo circuit which took him to every state in the union and several countries south of the border. His experiences would fill a book. He was a personal friend of Ken Maynard, Hoot Gibson and Leo Carillo and did a lot of riding in shows and movies with them. He taught many movie starlets, including Maureen O'Hara how to ride a horse. Since 1966 Joe has been head pick-up man in the Frontier Town rodeos.

was all about, and gave him permission to ride. That was some first ride! . . . he remembers how high he flew and how hard the ground was, and his father running over to him to take his hand. His pride was dented a little bit, so from then on, Joe rode anything that would buck at the ranch and traveled to compete in any rodeo that he could get to. Rodeo was the competitive sport that he grew up with, much the same as youngsters elsewhere would compete in baseball. . . .

When he was 17, Joe left home to travel a rodeo circuit that took him to every state in the union. In the 30's he worked with a wild west show that featured Ken Maynard, Hoot Gibson and Leo Carillo. He became good friends with them, and later in Hollywood he did a lot of riding with them in their movies. He taught many of the young starlets how to ride a horse, including Maureen O'Hara.

In the late 30's, Joe went rodeoing south of the border . . . Cuba, Venezuela, Peru, Argentina and then after the war, it was off to Europe. In 1969 in Cuba, the rodeo went broke (not the first time), and he was befriended by some locals who invited him to stay at their camp up in the Sahara Maestero Mountains. It was here he got to know Castro and his "bearded ones." The following year, while with a rodeo in the Dominican Republic, he was arrested by Trujillo and sentenced to be shot as a Castro spy. Apparently Trujillo must have had his own spies with Castro. There follows a storybook escape . . . two young girls lured the guards away from his cell and he escaped on to a freighter leaving for the States.



Paul and Becky Clawson impress our visitors with their expert trick and fancy roping. They have been written up in many newspapers and magazines and they have appeared in many TV shows including "To Tell the Truth".

Joe may have rode his last bucking horse, but at Frontier Town he still performs the dangerous task of crawling alongside a bucking bronc after the eight second ride to pick up the rider. He considers himself lucky in that he has gotten only one broken leg in these ten years at Frontier Town. Generally after the rodeo he'll "met up" with some of the visitors to Frontier Town, and the remark most kids will come up with will be, "You're a real cowboy, aren't you, Joe?" And Joe will tell them, "Yup, a Montana cowboy, and I get back to ride the range every year." And then he'll tell them about his first ride on a horse and . . .

Often he is asked if he remembers any one particular extra wild ride that he made in his long years of rodeoing . . .and he'll reply, "Yup, *every* one. When you set yourself down aboard a vibrating, snortin' mountain of horse flesh, and the gates swing wide open . . . every one is a particular ride." He points out that sometimes even the sorriest bucking horse will put on a performance that will sit the rider on his head and then even the easiest ride can result in a spill that will lay you up for months. And he'll also remind them that rodeo is truly an American sport and one that will bring out the best in a man. With that assertion, he'll reach down, pull up one of his young admirers on to the saddle and sing out, "Let's go, Charlie. Let's show this young buckeroo what a horse is all about."

### CLARENCE CANARY

Clarence Canary, Frontier Town's rodeo announcer, is one of the very best in the business. With three performances a day seven days a week from July 1st through Labor Day for the past 20 years, he has announced more rodeos than anyone in the history of rodeos—over four thousand.

CLARENCE CANARY

Clarence Canary is one of the finest rodeo announcers in the business. He has announced over four thousand rodeos at Frontier Town. This is in addition to the rodeos he had announced elsewhere before coming to Frontier Town over twenty years ago. He has had many years of experience in riding rodeo rough stock and as a performer specializing in trick and fancy roping, trick riding, and sharp shooting. Between rodeos, Clarence works in our leather carver's shop where he makes saddles and leather products for use at Frontier Town and for sale to our visitors.

Clarence ran away from home at the age of fifteen to join the circus. He has lots of stories to tell of circus life. He graduated to rodeoing as a rough stock rider, a sharp shooter and a trick and fancy roping artist. Clarence traveled all over the United States and in many of the countries in Europe, experiencing times of prosperity and times of adversity with rodeos over the years. He was with a rodeo that went broke in Switzerland. He tells how during the depression he was with a rodeo that didn't even have trucks to transport their horses to the next engagement on the other side of the Hudson River, so Clarence and his helpers aimed their horses down the road toward the Bear Mountain Bridge. The horses, of course, galloped right past the toll booth and by the time Clarence and his boys came up to the booth and faced the irate toll collector who demanded payment of the toll for the horses, Clarence explained that they didn't have any money, paid ten cents apiece for himself and his helpers and hastened across the bridge to herd the horses to the next town.

Clarence is a skilled leather carver and saddle maker and makes many of the saddles we use at Frontier Town. Between rodeos he is found in his leather carver's shop next to the canteen in Frontier Town.

## POODLES HANNEFORD

Here are excerpts from an article on Poodles Hanneford that appeared as a feature story in the Albany Times Union on Sunday, October 25, 1959.

### POODLES HANNEFORD, FAMED CLOWN, STILL A THREE-RING CIRCUS

**By Shirley Armstrong**

Times-Union Staff Writer

"There's something about that music. It starts and you're on. Of course you may be on crutches—a bit awkward. But, well—it's show business."

The old gentleman with the laugh-lined face paused, chewed reflectively on the inevitable cigar. And the flames of a million memories danced in his eyes.

For Poodles Hanneford, the music began nearly 70 years ago, and it's still coming in, loud and clear. The tune and the tempo have changed. The man—one of the greatest clowns of all time—has not.

"The Ol' Prospector," who's been striking rich veins of humor at Frontier Town in the Adirondacks for four seasons, is the same lovable Poodles who blazed a sawdust trail to circus fame in the golden age of the big top.

He's 69 now. His hair—worn long for his "Panhandle Pete" characterization at the North Hudson resort—is iron gray. But he's agile as a youngster half his age. And he's still the superb showman whose fabulous career has spanned the entertainment panorama from silent flickers to talkies, from vaudeville to TV.

At Frontier Town, where the Hannefords will again open next May, Mrs. Hanneford operates a weaver shop, demonstrating making of rag rugs and balsam pillows. Gracie rides in the rodeo. And she serves as the steel-nerved assistant while her Dad performs the hazardous Australian whip act.

#### *Debut at Age of 4*

At the age of four, Poodles made his official debut, doing a bareback riding act with his Dad. During the early years, he managed to be in practically every act. He was the human ball in the juggling act. He clowned on the high wires. He was living the life kids dreamed of running away from home for—and he loved the work as much as the play. There was plenty of both.

When his folks toured Ireland with their own circus, Poodles did as many as eight acts—and walked the elephant from town to town. There were countless chores of cleaning and feeding the animals. And somehow, he had to find time for schooling.

"In those days the circus stayed put quite awhile," recalled Poodles. "When we'd hit a town, I'd go to school there." His eyes twinkled. "Even there, I couldn't forget the circus. In Glasgow, Scotland, ............... ........... Quite a few fell on their heads and had brain concussions."

Teacher may have developed a headache, too, the day the boys pushed back the desks and improvised a ring. Poodles had thoughtfully brought a donkey to school.

### *Bareback Riding His Choice*

Bareback riding was always his favorite act, and he soon found whenever he goofed and fell overboard, the audience roared. So he originated the comedy bareback act.

John Ringling, scouting for Barnum and Bailey in Europe, saw the Hannefords at the Royal Agricultural Hall in London and engaged them to open at Madison Square Garden. Poodles stopped the show. His was the first—and one of the few circus acts so honored. "The acrobats used to cuss at me," he laughed. "I'd be taking encores while they were waiting to go on."

After four years with Barnum and Bailey, the act went to the Hippodrome for four years, and of that venerable old hall Poodles speaks with nostalgia. "What a place! I'll never forget the night the Prince of Wales stood up in his box and waved to me."

At that precise moment, a picture was taken for a poster. Poodles still has a big, full-color copy, bearing the words, "The Prince of Wales applauds the Prince of Clowns." There's one also in the Circus Hall of Fame at Sarasota, Fla.

### *Then to Ringling Bros.*

After the Hippodrome closed—"I was in the last show, Billy Rose's 'Jumbo'," the act went with Sells-Floto Circus, then with Ringling Brothers.

### *Next was Hollywood*

Next was Hollywood, where Poodles made 42 eight-reel comedies. "I was on the same lot with Buster Keaton. Fattie Arbuckle was my first director. Slim Summerville directed me in 12 pictures."

Though he prefers a live audience—"I like to hear 'em laugh"—he enjoyed the film comedies. When talkies came in, he stayed on, playing character roles in such films as "San Antonio," with Errol Flyn; "Springfield Rifle," with Gary Cooper, and "The Golden Horse," with Ann Blythe. In "When I Grow Up," he proved himself equal to a serious portrayal—that of a tragic clown who died at the end.

### *Likes Television Medium*

Despite fondness for the past, Poodles is equally absorbed in the present and future. He's appeared on several TV shows and likes the medium, though he feels it can never meet the demand for quality material well enough to obscure other entertainment forms. And he's looking forward to the next season at Frontier Town.

In 1963 Poodles was brought to California where he was featured in a "This Is Your Life" program with Ralph Edwards.

Poodles died in 1967 after 11 years at Frontier Town.

This is Your Life Poodles

POODLES HANNEFORD WITH WIFE GRACE AND DAUGHTER GRACIE
Poodles Hanneford was the most famour bareback riding clown in history. He spent the last eleven years of his life at Frontier Town playing the part of Panhandle Pete — the old prospector. He was a star with Barnum Bailey, Ringling and other circuses. He starred in many Hollywood movies and at the Palace and Hippodrome in New York. He is enshrined in the circus Hall of Fame in Sarasota, Florida. He is shown here at a party given in his honor by Frontier Town employees on the occasion of his appearance on network TV on the "This is Your Life" program. With him in this photo are his wife Grace and his daughter Gracie both of whom are still working at Frontier Town.

His wife Grace and his daughter Gracie are still with us. Grace is in charge of our weaver's shop and Gracie performs in our rodeos with a fine dog act and excellant pony act. Between shows she demonsrates pottery making on an ancient kick wheel in our pottery shop in Prairie Junction. But we miss Poodles. He was a loyal employee and a true friend.

## FRONTIER TOWN'S RODEOS ARE HIGHLY RESPECTED

In addition to the contract acts our rodeo cowboys excite our visitors with their wild bucking horse rides, Brahma bull rides, bull dogging and calf roping performances. Some of them have gone on to be top money winners in the National Championship Rodeos.

Frontier Town has produced over 4,500 rodeos. More than have been produced by anyone else in the world.

Here is an account of our Frontier Town rodeo that appeared in the July 1970 issue of the Western Horseman, a very highly respected national magazine for horse lovers.

## FRONTIER TOWN RODEOS

### Western Horseman - July 1970

Three performances a day, seven days a week, from July through Labor Day—that's quite a few rodeos. But that has been the rodeo sched-

BETWEEN RODEOS GRACIE MAKES POTTERY
GRACIES HIGH SCHOOLED PONY
RODEO

Gracie Hanneford and her educated dogs. Insert top right - Gracie with her well trained pony "Cookie" and midnight in the saddle. Insert top left - Gracie at the potters kick wheel.

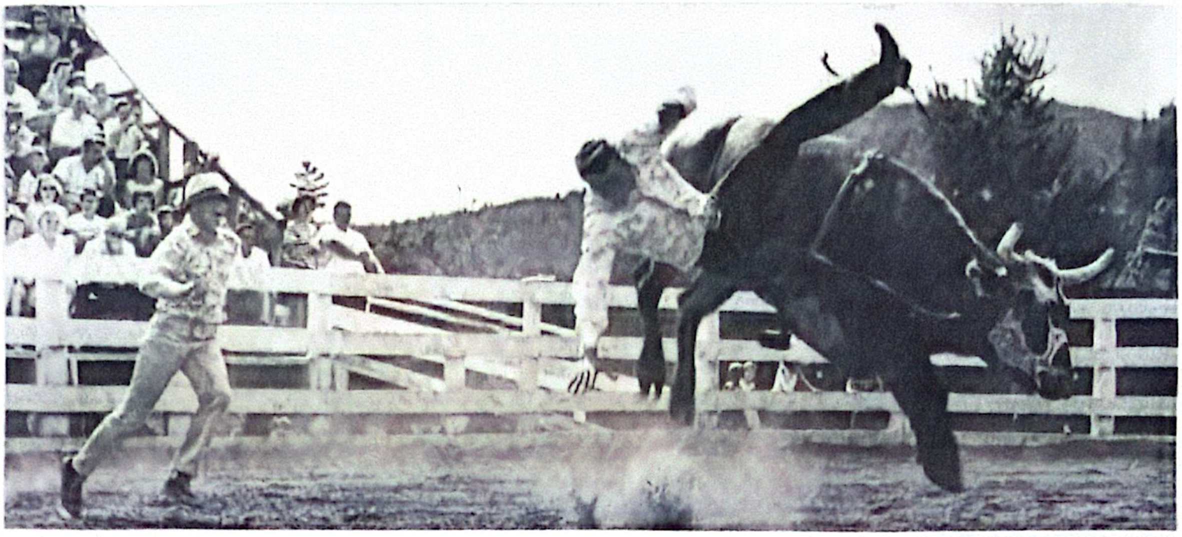
ule for the past 17 years at Frontier Town in the Adirondack Mountains of upstate New York.

Frontier Town is a complete western-theme park. Since 1952 this tourist attraction has brought some of the old west to the folks back east. Visitors step into history in a reconstucted western town that has stagecoaches, a steam train, cavalry, cowboys, Indians, and outlaws. The rodeo was started soon after the town opened and has been one of the highlights on the program ever since. Because of the great number of performances, the rodeos have become quite a training ground for rodeo talent. The cowboys come from all parts of the United States and Canada and usually get all the riding they want. Some are college students with inter-collegiate rodeo backgrounds, some are working cowboys, and there are even some of the new variety who learn to ride a bronc but still can't ride a saddle horse. They all want to rodeo.

Most cowboys stay on for the season. They realize there are no large purses to be won, but there are no travel expenses, and a cowboy can usually get a job working the chutes, feeding stock, or taking part in the action scenes in the town to pay his way. Many beginners, as well as more experienced cowboys, who have lost their lick and want to sharpen up on a lot of stock, have found the situation ideal.

Some have gone on to win their share of contest money. For example, Phil Heinen, who went to the National Finals Rodeo in 1966 in bareback riding, started at Frontier Town in the 1950's. Jackie Hammett, Rodeo Cowboys Association rodeo clown—and a good saddle bronc rider, who has been winning a lot in the south—also learned a lot of it at the Frontier Town arena.

New hands must prove themselves before they are really accepted by the rest of the crew. Last season everyone had doubts about one greenhorn in particular. He was a college student, the scholarly type, and mild mannered and polite. He was meek and bespectacled and no one could imagine him on a bucking horse.



This rider is headed for a hard landing in the Frontier Town rodeo arena.

Furthermore, he had no experience around stock. But he wanted to ride saddle broncs. He would strap his saddle on a bale of hay, spur that bale, and ride like a champion. When he graduated to a saddle horse, he was forever measuring off that rein and sticking his feet out in front of the old pony's shoulders. He always seemed to be in a world of his own, studying just what he would do if that gentle saddle horse suddenly bogged his head and turned hostile.

Surprisingly, when he got on his first bronc, he sat up and rode him like he ought to. Of course he learned to get bucked off, too, but by the end of the season he was riding the toughest horses in the string. The doubts of the other riders about the schoolboy turned to respect.

The cowboys also become aware of the production side of rodeo and the value of a good performance for the spectators. With a continuing program of entertainment throughout the western town, visitors cannot be kept in one place very long. Therefore, the rodeo performances must be short and fast-moving.

Cowboys learn that the seconds they spend sitting in the chutes, after they have been announced, can seem like an eternity to a spectator. Clarence Canary, the rodeo announcer, and a former contestant himself, puts it this way: "Once you are ready and get down on your stock, sitting there shaking for another hour isn't going to do a bit of good. So be ready to get on, and come when called." When Clarence is not announcing the rodeo, he operates the town saddle shop. Several cowboys are usually around working on their gear or picking up a few hints on their riding.

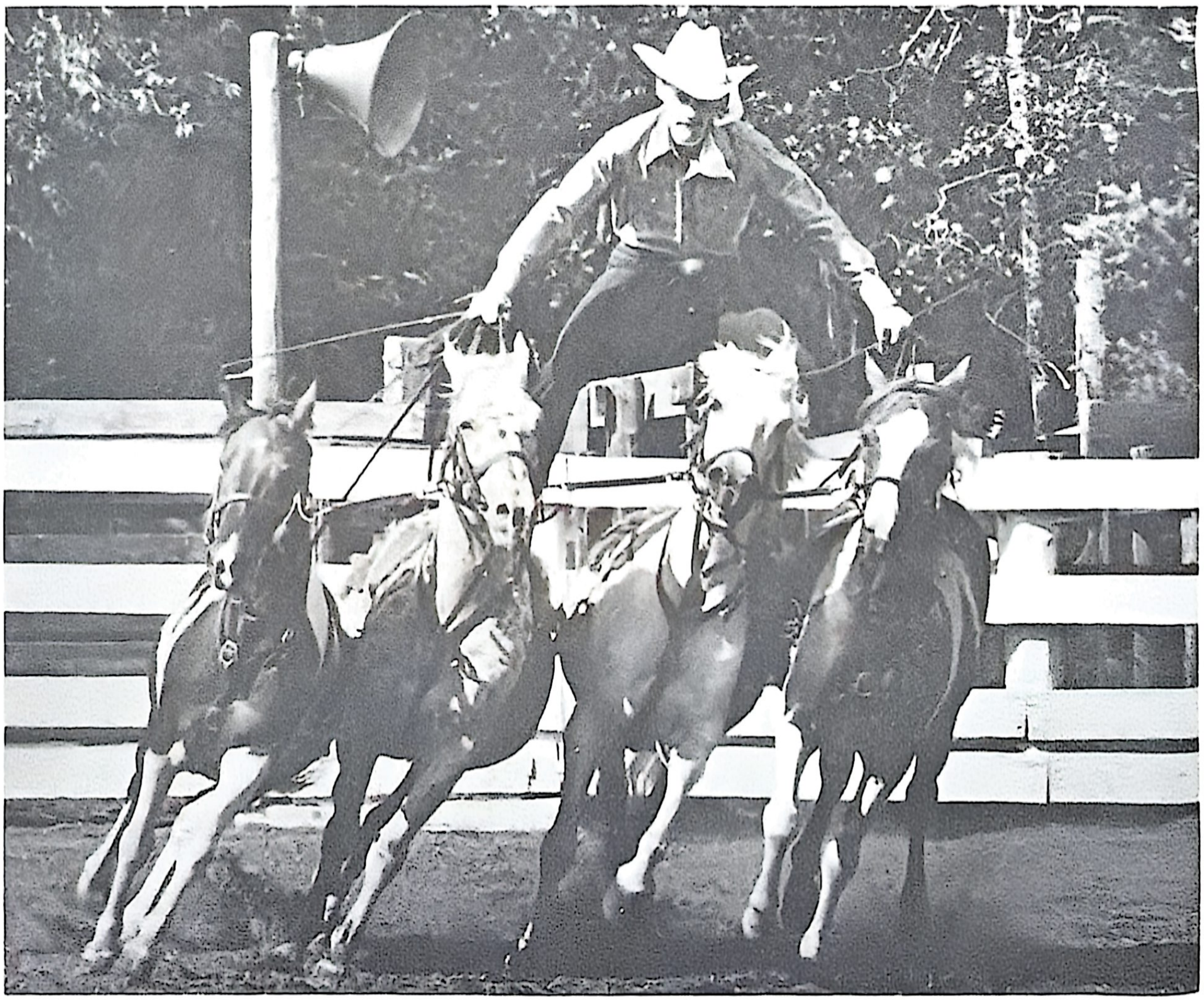
A veteran rodeo pick-up man, Joe Evans, is also held in high regard by the cowboys, and they frequently seek him out for advice. A Montana cowboy and an all-around hand, Evans has worked on ranches in Puerto Rico and South America as well as throughout the west and Canada. He has worked rodeos for years, both in this country and abroad. In Frontier Town when a visitor wants to see a real cowboy, everyone points at Joe.

In addition to the regular events, contract acts are used to round out the rodeo. A feature is Gracie Hanneford and her trained dogs. Miss Hanneford is the daughter of circus clown "Poodles" Hanneford, who also appeared at Frontier Town until his death two years ago.

Trick riding and trick and fancy horse roping, traditional acts that were once a part of most rodeos, were also on the 1969 program. Mack Roberts of Indiantown, Fla., one of the few present-day trick riders to go under the belly of a running horse, performed the trick riding. Dick Cory of Kissimmee, Fla., who does the intricate horse catches, credits his skill with the maguey to instruction from trick roper Bud Mefford. Esteemed in the roping fraternity, Mefford was a judge at the World Championship Trick and Fancy Roping Contest at Oklahoma City in 1966. He is best known in the rodeo world for his many years with the late Col. Jim Eskew's JE Ranch Rodeo. But is also employed at Frontier Town as program director and tower announcer for the street scenes.

Aside from the rodeo, horsemen visiting Frontier Town show a great deal of interest in the authentic Concord Stagecoach. The coach was manufactured in 1857 by Abbott-Downing in Concord, N.H., and is one of a fleet of ten stagecoaches that has carried millions of passengers in the years Frontier Town has been in operation.

The Concord is frequently used in promotional tours in nearby cities. In fact, it was once pulled by a four-horse hitch through the streets of New York City in a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.



A featured performer in our rodeos is Chris Clawson who does a spectacular Roman riding act using four horses. I know of no other Roman rider using more than two horses.

A typical Conestoga wagon, pulled by a yoke of oxen, is the center of attraction when the wagon train comes to town, escorted by a troop of cavalry. The procession is a favorite subject for photographs. The oxen, Rock and Diamond, are cued by whip and voice command. They weigh about 2,000 pounds each and are of Devon breeding.

Frontier Town encourages guests not merely to look on, but to participate in the life of the town. Horseback riding is available for all age groups. There is a pony ring for small children, a controlled riding area called the "Buckaroo Roundup" for inter-mediate riders, and trail rides through the Adirondack forest for the "old hands."

Since its opening, Frontier Town has continually grown until today, more than 300 people are employed. The complete entertainment complex includes motel, restaurants, swimming area, and an air strip. The management is quick to point out, however, that the cowboy and his horse are still the stars of Frontier Town.

So if you happen to ask a rodeo cowboy where he got his first bronc or bull, don't be too surprised if he says, "Back east, in Frontier Town."

# Chapter Nine

# OUR LATEST AND MOST EXCITING ADDITION TO FRONTIER TOWN

## OUR RESTORATION OF ROTH'S FORGE WHICH DURING THE CIVIL WAR MADE IRON FOR THE UNION WARSHIP "MONITOR" BY THE BLOOMERY FORGE METHOD, THE EARLIEST METHOD USED IN THE IRON AND STEEL INDUSTRY.

Although from the very beginning we have presented frontier crafts, such as spinning, weaving, pottery making, glass blowing and other activities aimed at adults, somehow Frontier Town has become best known as a "kid" attraction with cowboys.

In late years however, while maintaining and expanding the quality of our rodeos and other western activities, we have expanded and improved our frontier crafts program and we have added our Frontiers of Industry with a covered bridge, an operating 100-year-old steam sawmill, an operating ice house which visitors can enter and see blocks of ice cut the previous

Two of the old timers enjoy a game of checkers in our country store.

Evelyn Clark, who has been with us from the beginning, is in charge of our country store. Her great grandfather, E. B. Walker, was one of the founders of the Civil War iron making village of Roth's Forge located on the land we bought from Frank Palmer.

winter on our pond and kept from melting by sawdust from our sawmill, and an operating water-powered gristmill. We find that we are finally correcting our "kid" image and are attracting an ever increasing number of adult visitors to see our crafts and our Frontiers of Industry, and we are pleased to note that these adults are pleasantly surprised to find that they also enjoy the high quality of our rodeos and western activities.

A few years after Frontier Town opened in 1951, we bought the adjoining land owned by Frank Palmer. Frank casually happened to mention that in 1875 he had been born in the tiny iron producing hamlet of Roth's Forge, which had been located right there on the premises which we bought from him. Frank's father had been employed as a collyer, or charcoal maker there. Upon hearing this, I immediately embarked on a program of research and archeology. I discovered that Roth's Forge was described in two history books of the region. It was built in 1857 by Jacob Parmeter and E. B. Walker, the grandfather of Evelyn Clark who is in charge of our country store. They built it for the purpose of supplying wrought iron to the Union for the Civil War which was then looming on the horizon. In 1861, the first year of the Civil War, the village was bought by John Roth and thenceforth was known as the village of Roth's Forge. John Roth operated the village during the Civil War and was still operating it when Frank Palmer was born there in 1875. Frank was born in a company house located less than 200 feet from the Forge itself and often told me that when that water-powered trip hammer was in operation, it shook the ground and the house in which he lived. Roth's Forge village consisted of the forge, charcoal kilns, the ore separator, blacksmith shop, the sawmill, gristmill, boarding house, company houses, general store, and wheelwright shop. It provided housing and the necessities of life for those producing iron there. Frank Palmer knew John Roth personally. He describes the village in a letter he wrote to me in 1964. Here are some excerpts from that letter:

August 12, 1964

Mr. Arthur Bensen
Frontier Town
North Hudson, New York

Dear Art:

Ever since you bought my property you have been talking about rebuilding things the way they use to be when I was a youngster. I garanty your visitors shure will find it interesting. Well I decided to write you a letter so you can be shure to remember everything.

I can remember when there was a lumber mill and a grist mill near where the dam is now. Little farther down the stream was a wrought iron forge and three charcole kills all going full blast. Right hear thear was a large boarding house. All so fourteen other houses that famileys lived in and a general store that sold all kinds of family supplies like groceries and clothing.

There all so was a midling sized ice house. They cut the ice on the pond each winter by hand with ice saws. It was hauled out of the water with tongs that was made for that purpose and was drawn to the ice house with horses. That was the onley power that we had to move such at that time.

The lumber mill was a common framed building with the two sides inclosed and both ends was mostley open.

The grist mill was a common framed builing all inclosed with one large doar and one small one. It was run by a water wheel.

There all so was a ore crusher which was a part to the forge. When the ore was delivered hear by the teams it was dumped on a sideling place where it worked down under or in a crusher ben where ther was four light hammers that pounded it up very fine.

The iron was drawn to Crown Point by teams. They had two outlets. One a foundry in Troy, N.Y.; one in Pitsburg, Pa.

It took five men to operate the forge. You asked if they drank. They drank plenty. The boss sold it by the quart. One dollar a quart.

Thay had three charcole kills. Some one of those kills were burning about all the time. They were filled with mostley hard wood. The reason for useing charcole insted of wood—the charcole and with those blowers thay had in the forge you could make a great deal hotter fire than you could with wood. You couldn't melt ore with wood fire.

When I was very young my father was the colyier. That was what thay called the man that attended the kills while thay were burning from wood to charcole.

The store when I was a little shaver was run by John Roth. The materials that was in the Store was all different from the ways of today. The flour all came in wooden barrels. Pork came in wooden barrels and Corned Beef Molasses and Syrup came in barrels also. The Fish were salted and dried and came in boxes. There was plenty of Cod Fish 3 feet long. They were removed from thear container and piled in the back room of the Store like a pile of wood and all the difrent barels were in the back room. I remember one time a lady came with a gallon jug for a jug of Molasses. Mr. Roth takes the jug and set it under the fausit. Being cold weather the Molasses was coming very slow. He told the lady she would have to wait; he couldn't get her jug filled until later. Mr. Roth didn't think of the jug of Molasses until the next day. When he opens the doar to go in the back room he found the Molasses had all run out on the floar. Then he takes Cod Fish, laid them on the floar and a board from one fish to another to get the things he needed. This remained in this state for a week or 10 days before he had it cleaned up.

One day my Fother walked in the Store said to Mr. Roth 'I want a barrel of flour.' Mr. Roth said, 'Where is your horse and wagon to take the barel of flour hom with?' Fother said, 'I dont need any horse to take a barrel home.' Roth said, 'If you can carey a barel of flour home on your sholder I will give it to you.' At that Father sholdered a barel and walked off home with it. In about two hours later Fother walked in the Store again. 'Roth,' he said 'Will you giv me a barel of Pork if I will take it home my sholder?' 'No sir!' was the reply.

In 1881, this property was taken from John Roth by a mortgage forclosur by Powel Smith. About one year or so Powel Smith sold to a Company Clark and True. Thay continued running the buiseness about

FRANK PALMER

The charcoal which ninety one year old Frank Palmer is pointing to was made by his father who was a collier (charcoal maker) at Roth's Forge Village. This charcoal was dumped on the ground when Roth's Forge closed down in 1883.

one year. I think in the fall of 1883 the Forge burned. At that all buiseness stoped.

There was a few familys living hear for a time. A Mr. William K. Johnson was the boss. At that time he sold houses to be torn down and second hand brick that was taken from the torn down kills.

Yours Truly
FRANK PALMER

My research also revealed that the ore from which Benedict Arnold made the iron fittings for the first ships of the American Navy came from the Moriah beds on Lake Champlain which are now owned by the Republic Steel Corporation. Mr. Pat Farrel, the manager of their mines in Mineville, arranged for them to donate to us two thousand tons of this historic ore which we are now using in producing iron in our restored Roth's Forge in our Frontiers of Industry.

My research also revealed that during the Civil War, wrought iron from Roth's Forge was shipped to the Albany Iron Works in Troy, New York and there made into armor plates for the Union ironclad Monitor which fought the Merrimac during the Civil War in the first battle of iron ships in Naval history. This company in Troy is still in business. When I visited them, they were excited about our restoring Roth's Forge and showed me several plates which they had in their vault left over from the Monitor job. They gave me a portion of one of these plates to put on display at our Roth's Forge restoration.

In our restoration we had the benefit of the services of Mr. Earl Heydinger, the top authority on old iron works in the United States. Here is a copy of a letter from Mr. Heydinger which shows his enthusiasm for this latest addition to our Frontiers of Industry:

EARL J. HEYDINGER
Iron, Railroad, Canal, River History
4988 Quince Drive
Reading, Pennsylvania 19606
Phone 215-582-8583

April 1, 1977

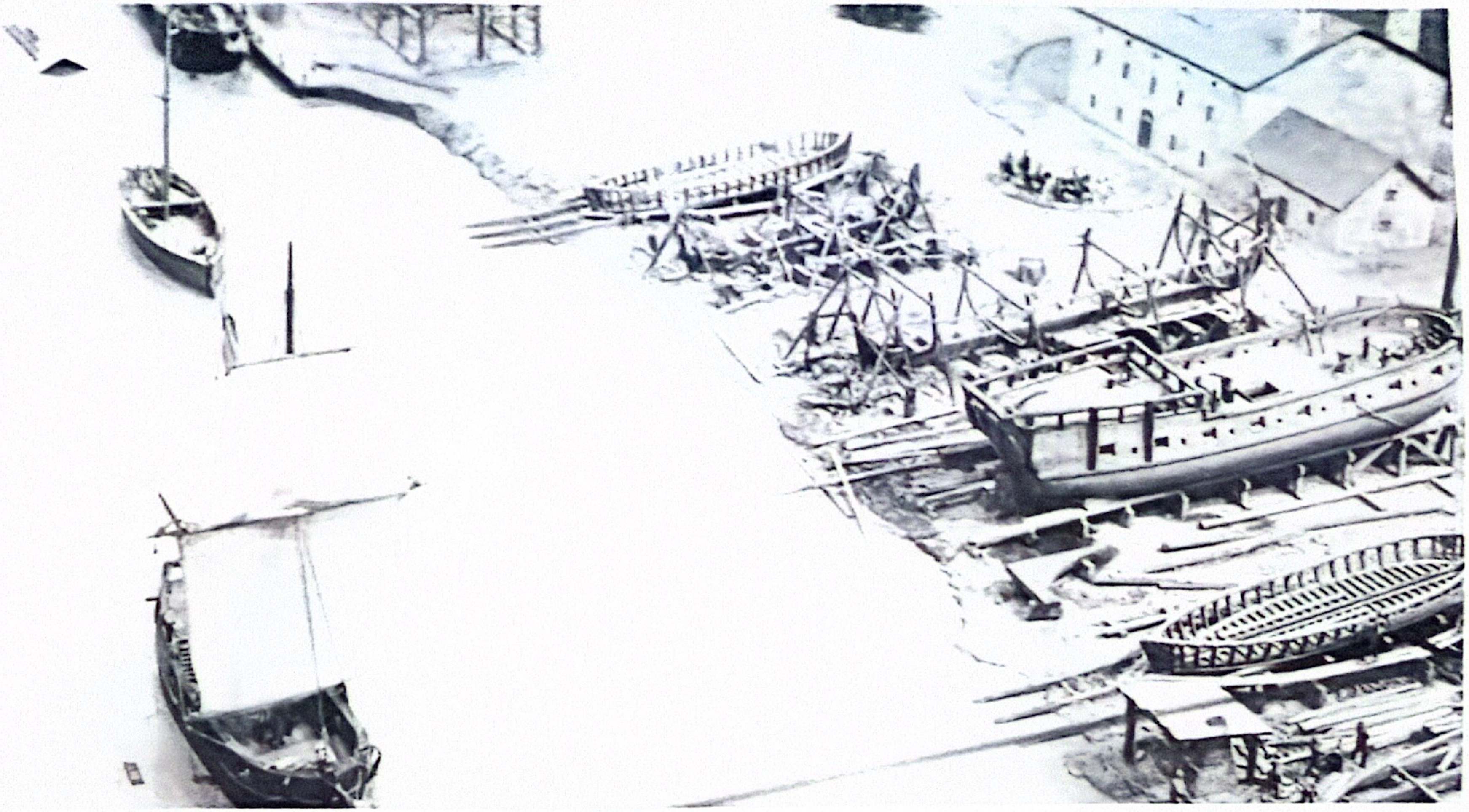
Mr. Arthur L. Bensen
Frontier Town
North Hudson, N. Y. 12855

Dear Mr. Bensen,

I am delighted to have been of assistance to you in the restoration of the bloomery forge of the historic Adirondack wrought iron manufacturing village of Roth's Forge. You may count on my continued enthusiastic cooperation as the restoration continues.

As you know, until my recent retirement, I was the official historian at Hopewell Village in Pennsylvania, a National Historic Site of the National Park Service devoted to iron. Hopewell and Saugus (located in Mass. and also operated by the U.S.N.P.S.) were restored to show the history of our great American iron and steel industry.

Like Roth's Forge, Hopewell was a remote self contained iron producing village which provided housing and living facilities for the people



SKENESBOROUGH HARBOR IN 1776

At the same time as the Americans captured Fort Ticonderoga on Lake Champlain they also captured Skenesborough (now Whitehall, N.Y.) at the south end of Lake Champlain. Skenesborough had been built by Philip Skene who was a British Loyalist — a Tory. The Americans also captured the schooner Katherine which Skene had built in 1772. It was converted to a war ship and renamed the Liberty by Benedict Arnold and became the first ship of the American Navy in 1775. The Liberty is shown at the dock at the top of this photo. Benedict Arnold also used the facilities he found at Skenesborough to build twelve of the first ships of the American Navy some of which are shown under construction here. The bloomery forge (see photo page 122) manufactured the wrought iron used for the iron fittings of these ships.

working there. Like Roth's Forge it had company houses and store-office, wheelwright shop, blacksmith shop, and kilns for charcoal production. It lacked two facilities Roth's had, a grist mill and lumber mill.

However, unfortunately, Hopewell a furnace, does not show the *beginning* of our iron and steel industry. You see, furnaces were a *second* stage in the development of the industry. In its Saugus brochure the U.S.N.P.S. states plainly that the builders, about 1650, used the "modern" furnace method instead of the "tried and proven" bloomery forge method of iron manufacture. Even Valley Forge, the site of the famous encampment which most Americans are surprised to learn was an iron producing village, was also a second stage furnace.

The Bloomery Forge was the first method used in the *old world* and *new world* in the manufacture of iron. Here's the difference between a Bloomery Forge and a furnace. In a Bloomery Forge, alternate layers of crushed ore and charcoal are placed in a fireplace, much like a present day blacksmith's forge. The charcoal is ignited and then a water-powered bellows is turned on. As Frank Palmer said, "It got so hot, you couldn't look at it." In a short time the charcoal has burned up. The ore is reduced to a pasty consistency which can be picked up by a set of tongs and brought over to a water-powered trip hammer and pounded into bars of wrought iron. This maleable wrought iron can be re-heated and shaped by a blacksmith into horseshoes, nails, and household and farm tools and utensils, etc. In a bloomery forge small amounts of iron can be made at a time.

When the demand for iron in a community exceeded the capacity of a bloomery forge, a furnace was built. This consisted of a high structure generally made of cut stone and lined with sandstone. It was built next to a bank so that a ramp could be built leading up to an opening in the side of the chimney near the top for loading the charcoal ore and limestone used in making iron. These furnaces required three days of preheating with vast amounts of charcoal before the ore could be put in and smelted and once in blast were continuously filled night and day until the sandstone lining had burned out and had to be replaced. The liquid metal was run out into troughs with side branches which were dug into the sandy floor. These ditches and branches reminded one early observer of a sow suckling her young, hence the names sows and pigs still used in the industry today. These sows and pigs are cast iron which is hard and brittle and cannot be shaped by a blacksmith into horseshoes, household utensils, etc. Before cast iron can be used for these purposes it must be re-heated to a pasty consistency and pounded by a trip hammer into wrought iron.

It can be readily seen that to operate a blast furnace like Hopewell would require tremendous amount of charcoal, iron ore and limestone. For this reason neither Hopewell nor any other furnace in the United States event attempts to operate. On the other hand your bloomery forge can operate as many times a day as you wish and demonstrate to your visitors the actual manufacture of wrought iron from raw ore.

I can assure you that your Roth's Forge is the only operating bloomery forge on the North American Continent, nor are there any non operating bloomery forges in existence that I am aware of. I can also assure

CIVIL WAR HISTORY

Standing next to our restored Roth's Forge a Frontier Town employee holds a piece of armor plate made for the Civil War Union warship Monitor. Roth's Forge Village was located on land adjoining my original Wathsock purchase. We bought this land from Frank Palmer who was born there in 1875 and lived there as a boy while this small industrial hamlet was still in operation. During the Civil War wrought iron made here was shipped to the Albany iron works in Troy, New York and made into armor plates for the Monitor. I visited the company (now the Portec Co.) in Troy and they took me into their vault and showed me several armor plates left over from the Monitor contract. They cut this piece off from one of the plates and gave it to me for display at our Roth's Forge Restoration. As the water wheel indicates the trip hammer and bellows of our restored Roth's Forge are, like the original, powered by water.

you that your bloomery forge truly shows the *beginnings* of our great American iron and steel industry.

While I have done many years of research on bloomery forges I have never before had the privilege of meeting anyone who had seen a bloomery forge in actual operation so you can understand why when I first heard from you that Frank Palmer had actually seen Roth's Forge producing wrought iron I lost no time in getting up there to see him. I certainly am happy that I got to him before he died and while his mind and memory were perfectly clear even though he was over ninety. I am glad too that we recorded what he had to say. I know that your visitors must enjoy hearing about Roth's Forge from his own lips.

It is exciting to know that you are making iron from ore that comes from the same ore beds that supplied Benedict Arnold with the ore which he used in the bloomery forge at Skeensboro to make the iron fittings for the first ships of our American Navy which played such an important part in winning the American Revolution.

It is even more exciting to know that Roth's Forge provided wrought iron for the Union iron-clad Monitor of Civil War fame. It was a thrill for me to hold in my hand the piece of plate which you obtained from the company in Troy, N. Y. which made the plates for the Monitor and still has some of them in its vault there in Troy.

I believe that because of its authenticity Roth's Forge will be a must for school children for miles around and I am sure that when the news media learn of the genuineness of Roth's Forge in depicting the *beginnings* of our great American iron and steel industry they will tell the world about it.

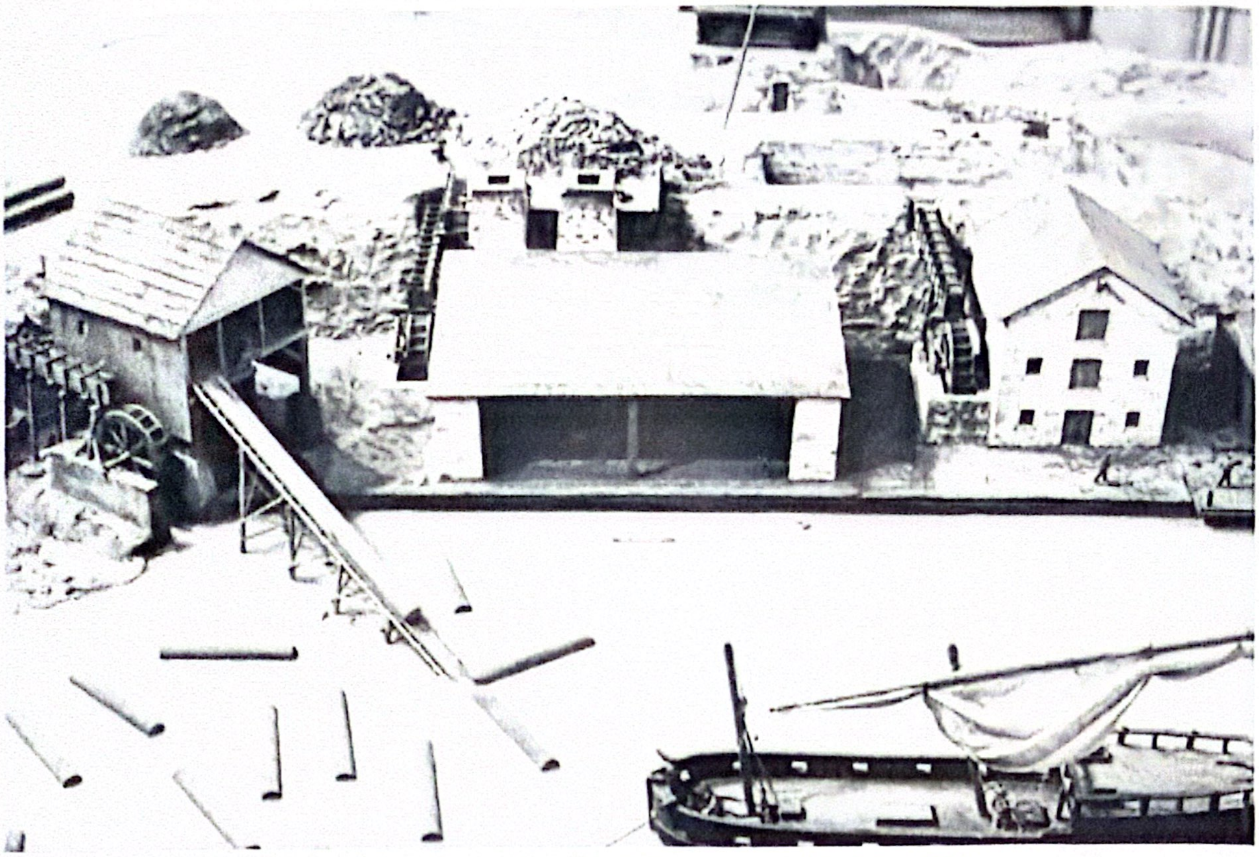
Think of it. In this day and age a place where people can actually see the manufacture of iron from raw ore by the ancient bloomery forge method.

Yours truly
EARL J. HEYDINGER

Here is an excerpt from the tape recorded by Mr. Heydinger when he interviewed Mr. Palmer at the site of Roth's Forge. Frank Palmer speaking:

"One day we heard that Frank Hamner, the hammersman in the Forge, had a bum back and John Roth had arranged for Lo Duntley to come down and do the hammering. Now I knew that Lo Duntley was a very small man and Frank Hamner was a big husky fellow and we all wondered whether Lo Duntley could do the hammering. So, the next morning, bright and early, I was in the forge and Lo Duntley was there alright, but they chased me out saying, 'you've got to get out of here, young fellow, you'll get burnt.' But I went out the side door and right in the front door, because I was determined to see whether Lo Duntley could do the hammering. The hammersman sat on the end of a long set of tongs that were hung on a swivel chain from the ceiling, and he maneuvered with his feet so that he could pick up a lump of iron that had melted to a pasty consistency in the fireplace and swing it over under the water-powered trip hammer which pounded it into wrought iron. Being light in weight, Lo Duntley had to pick up a piece of iron to give himself weight but he managed to make just as much iron that day as the regular hammersman did."

My research reveals that early in the Revolution, Benedict Arnold had used a bloomery forge at Skenesborough (now Whitehall, New York), a captured Tory community at the south end of Lake Champlain, to make the iron fittings for the first ship of the American Navy which Arnold built there in Skenesborough and with which he fought the British invasion force at Valcour Island, near Plattsburg, New York in 1776. Arnold was defeated and the ships of his fleet captured or destroyed, but as a result of this battle, the British timetable was interrupted. They



SKENESBOROUGH BLOOMERY FORGE 1776

Close up of the bloomery forge (the same type we have restored at Frontier Town) showing also the sawmill (left) and the grist mill (right). Note the piles of iron ore behind the sawmill and the forge. This ore came from the Moriah ore beds about twenty five miles east of Frontier Town which are now owned by the Republic Steel Corp. Both Skene and Benedict Arnold transported this ore to the bloomery at Skenesborough in a sailing vessle which was captured by Benedict Arnold and Ethan Allen and used to transport their troops across Lake Champlain in their successful attack on Fort Ticonderoga. We have two thousand tons of this historic Moriah iron ore which was given to us by the Republic Steel Corporation for use in demonstrating to our visitors the manufacture of wrought iron in our restored historic bloomery forge at Frontier Town. The scale model shown in these photographs depicting Skenesborough Harbor in 1776 was constructed by Captain Edward Farmer (U.S.N. Ret.). This model is on display at the Skenesborough Museum at Whitehall, New York which also has many other exhibits honoring Skenesborough as the birthplace of the American Navy.

were forced to return to Canada and the invasion was delayed for another year until Burgoyne came down Lake Champlain with his Army in 1777. This delay of a year allowed time for the Americans to be alerted and they defeated Burgoyne at Saratoga. The result of the Saratoga victory was that France came into the war and this ultimately resulted in victory for the Colonies.

It is our intention, in the future, to restore the ore separator, the charcoal kilns and other features of Roth's Forge Village.

# Chapter Ten

## ADIRONDACK CHAMPLAIN AREA ONE OF THE OUTSTANDING VACATION LANDS IN THE UNITED STATES

Here's how it is described by the New York State Travel Bureau:

“The Adirondack Champlain Area is a land of forests, lakes and mountains whose watershed nourishes the St. Lawrence River to the North and the Hudson River to the south.

Within the boundaries of this vast region is the Adirondack Forest Preserve, where more than 2¼ million acres of State-owned lands remain “forever wild” for the enjoyment of all people. There are also 42 mountain peaks more than 4,000 feet high, including the state's highest, 5,344-foot Mount Marcy, and hundreds of lakes, the largest being 110-mile long Lake Champlain.

Hiking, mountain climbing, camping and canoeing are the lures that draw many vacationers to this land of striking beauty. More than a thousand miles of trails have been developed for the benefit of outdoor enthusiasts by the state and private sources. There are also 262 lean-tos, more than 135 public and private campgrounds and hundreds of miles of canoe routes. A popular Central Adirondack route takes paddlers through the Fulton Chain of Lakes, the Requette River and the Saranacs.

Vacationers need not be of the rugged type to enjoy the area's other attractions. Golf, swimming, horseback riding and boat cruises are some of the inducements at resort communities such as Lake Placid, Lake George, Lake Luzerne, the Saranacs and Old Forge. There are also chair lift rides and scenic toll highways, restored forts and historic sites, museums that reflect the region's development and scores of children's attractions, whose offerings range from a stagecoach ride to a simulated space walk.”

Within a radius of 60 miles, in the lovely Adirondacks, lies a group of tourist attractions which collectively, in size and scope, excel even Disney World. These fine attractions include:

Ausable Chasm
Enchanted Forest
Fort Ticonderoga
Frontier Town
Gaslight Village
High Falls Gorge
Lake Champlain Scenic Line Ferries
Land of Makebelieve
North Pole
Sterling Alaska Fur and Game Farms
Storytown U.S.A.
Whiteface Mountain

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PHOTO — 21,146

Ausable Chasm about 60 miles north of Frontier Town.

And with all of this, there's a big bonus of lovely Adirondack Mountain scenery.

## OTHER POINTS OF INTEREST IN THE ADIRONDACKS

In addition to those mentioned above, the following are also worth seeing:

Ausable Chasm Antique Car Museum, Route 9, near Keesville, collection of early American autos.

Adirondack Museum at Blue Mountain Lake. Exhibits of paintings, dioramas, private railroad car, horse-drawn vehicles, tools, logging equipment, maple sugaring, Adirondack guideboats.

Time Town, Bolton Landing. Space Age and Yesteryear theme park.

Natural Stone Bridge & Caves, north of Pottersville. Lighted caves, grottos, potholes, nature trails, waterfalls, geology gallery, rock and mineral shop.

Crown Point Reservation (National Historic Landmark), near Champlain Bridge. Small museum, ruins of two forts, Champlain Memorial Lighthouse.

Adirondack Center Museum-Colonial Garden, Elizabethtown. Exhibits history of Essex County.

Old Fort House, Fort Edward, historic exhibits, dioramas, antique furniture.

Penfield Homestead Museum and Historical Recreation Area, Ironville. Home of Allen Penfield, iron manufacturer. Period furnishings, replica of early electromagnet, Civil War relics, local history exhibits.

Animal Land, Lake George. Animals, duck racing, alligator wrestling.

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PHOTO — 27.083V

Vacationers can explore the ruins of Fort Crown Point while picnicking, swimming or camping at Crown Point Reservation near the Lake Champlain Bridge. During the Revolution, Fort Crown Point was alternately held by British and American forces.

Boat Trips, Lake George. Sightseeing, moonlight trips.

Cavalcade of Cars, Lake George. Classic and antique cars.

Fort William Henry, Lake George. Restored fort of French and Indian Wars.

Prospect Mountain Veterans' Memorial Highway, Lake George, overlooks, viewmobiles operate from parking lot to summit.

John Brown Farm, Lake Placid, home and grave of the abolitionist.

Alvord Glove Co. Tour, Mayfield, glove-making plant, factory store.

Garnet Mine Tours, North Creek—World's largest producing garnet mine.

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PHOTO — 23,039

Intervales Hill, at Lake Placid, is the scene of outstanding jumping competition. For the benefit of summer tourists a ski jumping exhibition is presented here every Fourth of July.

Gore Mountain Gondola Lift, North Creek—2½ mile ride to summit.

Boat Trips, Old Forge—Riverboat Cruise on Moose River.

McCauley Mountain Chair Lift, Old Forge—Panoramic view of Fulton Chain of Lakes.

Piseco Lake Museum, Piseco—19th Century village tavern, period items, Adirondack relics, antiques.

Stevenson Cottage, Saranac Lake, House where Robert Louis Stevenson lived, maintained as literary shrine.

Fort Mount Hope, Ticonderoga—restored Revolutionary blockhouse and other buildings, cannon, ruins of Colonial warship.

Mount Defiance, Ticonderoga, toll road to summit follows British military route up which Burgoyne's artillery men dragged cannon which forced the Americans to surrender Fort Ticonderoga.

Whitehall, New York—"Birthplace of the U.S. Navy"—first fleet built here by Benedict Arnold.

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PHOTO — 24,8[illegible]

BOB SLED RUN — LAKE PLACID

Luge racing, one of the more exciting winter sports, draws crowds to New York State's north country. Here spectators watch as a 2-man led, climbs the wall while negotiating a curve at Lake Placid.

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PHOTO — 27,0[illegible]

Sightseers at Gore Mountain near North Creek admire the beauty of the Adirondack Mountains. A 2½-mile trip in a gondola leads to the Gore summit.

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE PHOTO — 24,947

A view of distant peaks, challenging runs and well-groomed trails attract skiers to Whiteface Mountain Ski Center in New York State's Adirondack Mountains. The chair lift operates for summer tourists also.

Whiteface Mountain Aerial Lifts, Wilmington, double chair lifts provide 2½ mile ride to summit of Little Whiteface.

The National Lead Company Mines, the largest titanium mines in the world, are located at Tahawus near Newcomb, New York.

The deep underground mines of the Republic Steel Company are located at Mineville, New York.

For a free booklet, entitled THE "ADIRONDACK" EXPERIENCE, write to:

Adirondack Promotion Council
Adirondack, New York 12808

For information on hunting, fishing, and state campsites, write to:

New York State Department of Commerce
99 Washington Avenue
Albany, New York 12201

These are just some of the things to see and do here in the Adirondacks.

Information about any points of interests, campsites, tourist accommodations, etc. may be obtained by writing to the Chamber of Commerce of the largest town in each area, as indicated on road maps which also show Frontier Town.

However, our greatest tourist attraction is the charming beauty of our lovely mountains, forests, lakes, rivers and valleys.

I am sure that after a visit to our Adirondacks you will agree with Lowell Thomas who says that this region is one of his favorite places on earth.

# CONCLUSION

It seems but yesterday that John Koller led me to my "promised land" on the old Wathsock farm. It is hard to believe that more than a quarter of a century has rolled by since I began to build Frontier Town. These have been very challenging but satisfying years. It has been great to get to know our wonderful Adirondack neighbors and to learn about our beautiful Adirondacks.

I am very greatful to God for strength and help in this undertaking. I have found that it's great fun to make a dream come true.

Arthur L. Benson

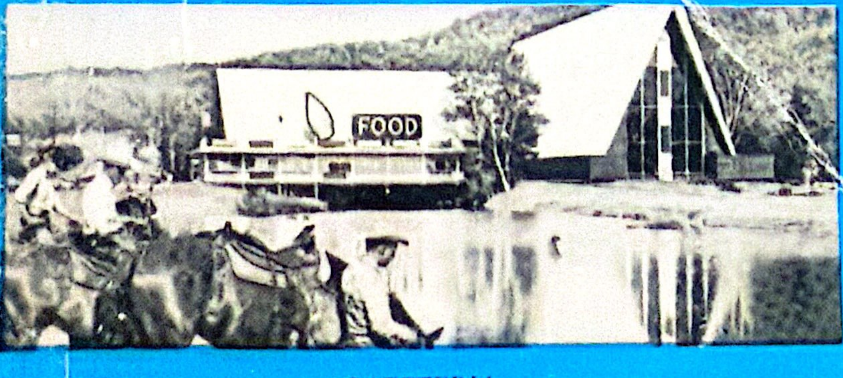
In 1951 I saw Art move into the horse stall in the old barn (above) the only building still standing on the abandoned Wathsoch Farm. By the following spring Art, Jim Liberty and I had rebuilt the barn into an office and converted the hay mow into a large comfortable apartment (see photo page 13) and Art was living there with his mother, Ed and Mack who had moved up from New York City. For over 25 years I have watched as they, literally with their own hands, have transformed that old farm into one of the largest and best historic tourist attractions (see photos below and inside) in the United States. I have seen it draw millions of visitors from all over the world to the tiny hamlet of North Hudson here in the beautiful Adirondack Mountains.

*Rev. James E. Matherly*

RAILROAD

SEVENTH CAVALRY

RESTAURANT



CAFETERIA

RODEO